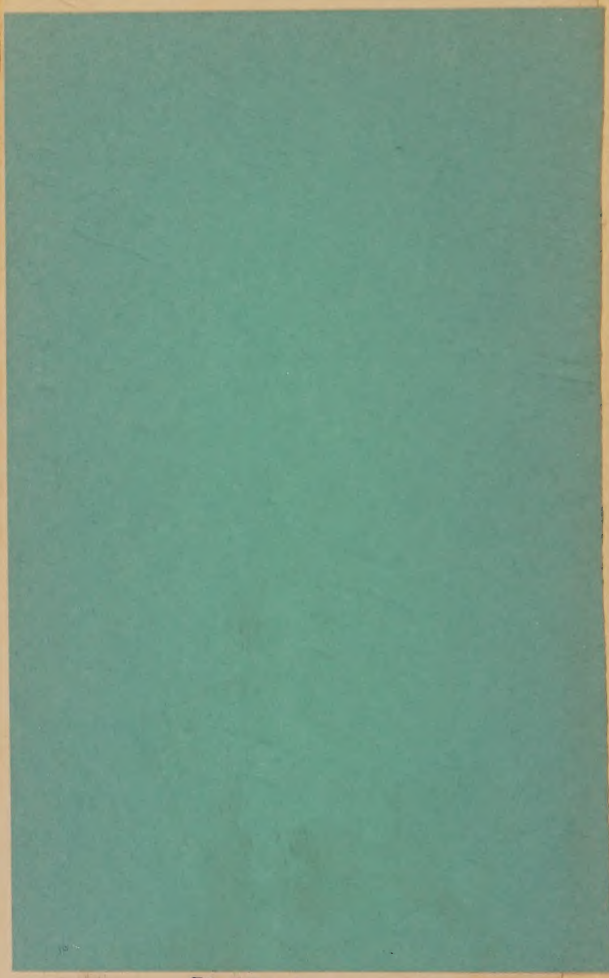
SUFFERING WITH HIM

Readings for the Sick

by

AMY DEBENHAM

KSM



Philadelpnia.

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN
GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

SUFFERING WITH HIM

Suffering with Him

BY

AMY DEBENHAM

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

THE REV. CANON A. H. B. BRITTAIN, M.A.

"IF SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM, THAT WE MAY BE ALSO GLORIFIED TOGETHER."—Rom. viii. 17.

A. R. MOWBRAY & CO. LTD.
LONDON: 28 Margaret Street, Oxford Circus, W.
OXFORD: 9 High Street
1910

TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF

CORPORAL JOHN GREEN

MIDDLESEX REGIMENT

AND OF MANY OTHER SOLDIER-FRIENDS

NOW GONE TO THEIR REST

ALSO TO

B. C. D. AND P. H.

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN
GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

BV
4910
D286
1910

Preface

Possibly district visitors and other Church workers may have shared the writer's experience of difficulty in finding readings at once quite suitable and quite simple enough for the unlearned, in time of sickness. Only those who have worked amongst them know how little previous knowledge of the Bible and of things spiritual there often is to work upon; though, thank God, there is often simple faith enough to put the learned to shame.

Hence, many allusions and references in the existing books, though full of help where they are understood, give but an uncertain sound for those to whom they are unfamiliar.

Times of weakness and suffering are, of all, the most unsuitable for instructing the brain; but at no time is the heart more receptive to the teaching of the Holy Spirit; and the visitor to the sick is, we may say with all reverence, one of His channels of power.

These readings or meditations on Bible truths and stories are published in the hope that they may meet the need of other workers, as they have that of the writer. As will be seen, they were written originally for the

16472

soldiers amongst whom she works. Consequently they may need adaptation and slight abbreviations for other sick people; but it seemed best, on the whole, to publish them as they stand, and as they were first read. Should they ever find their way to other suffering soldiers, may they be specially helpful to them; but their message and meaning is for all alike.

AMY DEBENHAM.

Introduction

It is with very real thankfulness that I have availed myself of the great privilege of being allowed to read in manuscript the most delightful and helpful readings which Miss Debenham has composed for this little book. I am greatly honoured in being invited, as it were, to be its godfather, and, in that capacity, to write a few words of introduction to it. I think that the very best introduction which I can give to it is to say that I have read every word of it with a grateful heart, and that I have been much encouraged and helped and comforted by the true words which it contains.

The book is written by one who knows, from a happy experience, the truth of the helpful lessons which she so well puts before her readers. It is a book written, I am sure, under a conscious influence and direction of Almighty God the Holy Ghost. It is a book which will be eagerly and gratefully welcomed by the clergy, by nurses who have such golden opportunities, of which, thank God, they so gladly avail themselves, of comforting with the comfort of God those who are ill, and by

all others whose mission it is to be allowed to minister to the sick.

The little book is gracefully and happily worded: it is the result of a rich experience, of a deep sympathy with the sick and the sorrowful, which has taught the writer the exact needs of those to whom in her pages she seeks to minister. The readings are admirably short and to the point—this is a consideration of first-rate importance in a book of this description.

When one is weak and ill, or may be recovering from a long illness, in the weary days of convalescence, the mind is not capable of any very great exertion; and these beautiful words which Miss Debenham has written are eminently suited for the special needs of those for whom she has written them. The short passages from the Holy Bible, in themselves full of comfort to those who are in weakness or in sorrow, are most hopefully made of real meaning to those to whom they are addressed. The writer has the gift of a GOD-given optimism: she knows and imparts the wonderful sense of the marvellous love of GOD. The life-work of her mission to our soldiers, so much valued by all who have had the privilege of becoming acquainted with it, has taught her the secrets of the hidden life lived by us all. She knows our sorrows, our hopes, our desires; and, at the moment of our needs, she tells us just what we want to know and which is so good for us

to hear. The plain, definite teaching is all that could be desired; and, it would be well within the limit of absolute truth, if I were to say that I am quite certain that it will prove to be a wonderful blessing to all who are privileged to make use of it, alike to reader and the one to whom its contents are read.

May GOD bless the book, and make it the means of bringing home to His saddened and weary ones the blessed Gospel of the love and wisdom of GOD.

ARTHUR H. B. BRITTAIN,

Senior Chaplain, H.M. Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment (Retired).

WHITTLEBURY VICARAGE,
TOWCESTER,
Advent Sunday, 1909.

Contents

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	The Great Healer	1
II.	Waiting Patiently	6
III.	What Jesus Christ came to do	10
IV.	The Lesson of the Flowers	15
V.	The Prodigal Son	22
VI.	Life Renewed	27
VII.	Looking to the Hills	33
VIII.	Taking up the Cross	37
IX.	The Soldier's Faith	44
X.	Prayer	52
XI.	Holy Communion. I	61
XII.	„ „ II	67
XIII.	The Touch of Faith	73
XIV.	The True Peace	78
XV.	Looking Upward	84
XVI.	The Transfiguration	89
XVII.	The House on a Rock	97
XVIII.	The Gift of the Holy Ghost	103
XIX.	Made Clean	110
XX.	Parable of "The Talents"	116
XXI.	The Wider Outlook	122
XXII.	Strength in Weakness	128
XXIII.	Suffering with Him	133
XXIV.	The Voice Across the Water	138
XXV.	Home	142
XXVI.	The Message of the Cross	149

Suffering with Him

I

The Great Healer

"And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them."—*S. Luke* iv. 40, R.V.

"But the multitudes . . . followed Him: and He welcomed them, and spake to them of the kingdom of God, and them that had need of healing He healed."—*S. Luke* ix. 11, R.V.

That was how they gathered round Him in the olden days—the days when He was on earth and went in and out day by day in the streets and lanes of the city. And wherever He was—in the market-place, or on the mountain-side, or by the waves of the sea-shore—who were they, those crowds that followed Him, that came to Him for sympathy, and for healing, and for help? Not the rich and prosperous, not the sound and healthy, not the pure and spotless.

No; they were the poor, the sick, the

sorrowful, the anxious; yes! and the sinful, too.

There, at the setting of the sun, they came to Him, at the end of the long day's work—and never, never, however tired and overworked He might be, did He say them no.

Jesus Christ no longer walks this earth in the form of a man. Many years have passed away since the days when the poor and sad of Jerusalem listened to His words of hope and comfort, and felt His kindly, healing touch.

But do you think He is one bit less near to us, His children, or less ready to help them than He was then? Do you think He has lost either His power or His willingness to touch and heal us?

No; a thousand times no! You have only to come to Him, and bring your burden, whatever it is, and He will not say you no.

Are you suffering pain? Are you low-spirited? Does it seem to you that the world has dealt hardly with you? Is the future dark and uncertain? Are you anxious about those you love?

Then come and tell Him all about it. Cast down the trouble at His feet—ask Him to touch and to heal you.

But perhaps you think—"The days of miracles are over—my body is past healing; I know very well I shall never be strong and well here, even if I ever get up again after this illness."

But remember that there is another part of you besides your body. The body is mortal—bound to die sooner or later; so that it cannot really matter so much what happens to that part of you. But there is the immortal soul—the soul that never for one instant will cease to live, to live for ever and ever—the soul for which JESUS CHRIST died on the Cross—what about that? That is the part that really matters. And does that want no healing? Are there no stains upon it? no sins of thought and word and deed, no carelessness, no forgetfulness of GOD, which, when you think about, trouble you sometimes? Do you ever think —"I am not fit to come to JESUS CHRIST—I am not worthy to stand before Him"?

Ah! but that is just the point. What were His own words?

"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." It is just because we are unworthy that we need Him and His help all the more. If we were to wait till we were good, we should never come.

He does not say, as some of the mothers do to their children, "Be good, and then I'll love you." He says, "I love you already; come to Me and I will make you good; I will heal you; not perhaps the poor perishing body that is causing you so much pain and discomfort now, although I will heal that too, one day, when I raise it up again to live and to serve Me for ever. But I will heal your soul now, the

soul I loved well enough to die for; I will make it pure and strong and free and holy—I will wash away the stains." This is what He says, and only two things He asks of you. He will do all the rest.

(1) You must feel, and you must own, that you are in need of healing. You must not say, like so many people do, "I don't see that there is much wrong with me; I've kept myself honest and respectable, and that's as much as one can expect to do." Ah! but how about your duty to GOD? He has thought so much of you. Have you thought enough of Him? He has done so much for you. Have you done enough for Him? Have you always served Him as you ought to have done?

No; we have all fallen short; not much doubt about that. We all want forgiveness and healing. We all want to claim our share of the love and mercy that never fail. And then:—

(2) (*a*) We must believe. We must believe He *can* help us, that He *is* almighty, all-powerful, and absolutely just and fair; that nothing is out of His all-seeing eye, nothing beyond His eternal power. We can never pass out of His hand—out of His keeping, unless by our own will we break away and refuse to let Him hold us.

(2) (*b*) And we must believe in His love, His willingness to help us, that He is longing at this very moment to do for you all the

good things you can think of, to make you good and strong and happy for ever.

And then, if you do these two things, if you own that you want healing, and if you believe in His power and love, you have only to come—

> "Just as I am without one plea
> But that Thy Blood was shed for me,
> And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
> O Lamb of God, I come."

Bring Him all the burden, the bodily suffering, the aches and pains, the weariness and weakness, so hard to bear, and which only He and you know about. Ask Him to help you bear them patiently and bravely. And bring Him the soul-troubles too, the sin and the carelessness that, once more, only you and He know about.

Don't be afraid of Him.

He loves you more dearly than you ever loved your dearest and best on earth. You have only to come, and the love and help are ready waiting for you.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

II

Waiting Patiently

"Their strength is to sit still."—*Isa.* xxx. 7.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my calling."—*Ps.* xl. 1.

"To sit still," to "wait patiently." How easy it sounds and how hard it sometimes is! We are leading an active, busy life; we are full of energy and "go," as we call it, always busy with head or hands, or perhaps with both.

And then, perhaps gradually, perhaps quite suddenly, God takes away the power to work, either for a time or permanently, and tells us to wait, to "sit still," to see our work done by others; to be weak and helpless, where we used to be strong and active; to do nothing, but to suffer instead. And in this, as in all other things, we, who are His true soldiers, must obey. We would far rather He gave us something to *do*, something hard, even something unpleasant. The very fact of being active about it seems to make it easier. But to lie still and suffer is a kind of obedience that calls for a higher kind of courage, a nobler kind of endurance altogether. And

just because it makes this higher call upon us, because it asks for rarer qualities in men and women, it is so much harder. Yes; and because harder, more honourable and more pleasing to GOD.

When you read the history of British warfare, you often find that some of the most important victories depended, not on a brilliant charge or a desperate assault, but on the troops standing steady under fire, waiting patiently in their place, each man at his post, until the right moment came, and the word to advance was given. This was what astonished the enemy; this was the proof of the soldierly steadiness characteristic of Britons, and an even more important fighting quality than impulsive courage and dash.

And in the stories of great sieges, like those of Lucknow and Ladysmith, don't you think the besieged really had the hardest part to play? Outside there was, with all the hardships and dangers and disappointments, yet the satisfaction of being mostly on the move. When one line of advance failed, at least another might be tried; if that failed, another, and so on. But for the besieged there was the long monotony of waiting and enduring, weary days succeeding anxious nights, one after another the same. Truly when Sir George White cabled home his memorable message after the relief of Ladysmith—"Thank GOD, we have kept the flag flying"—we at home felt that a great

triumph of courage and patient endurance had been achieved.

And are there no victories to be won on sick beds? No flags of patience and endurance to be kept flying through the long siege of a wearing and weakening illness? Ah, yes, indeed! all the more creditable because they are fought out all alone; all the more honourable and pleasing to GOD, because there is no earthly glory to be got out of them, and no applause from the world and the country. But GOD knows. He watches it all from His seat in heaven; and just as He knows and feels all the pain and weariness, so, too, He notices every bit of patience and brave bearing of the suffering. And every time an impatient word is checked, or an irritable feeling stifled, or a rebellious discontented thought dismissed, He looks down kindly on the sufferer, and says, as it were, "Well done. Well done, for you are following in My footsteps. Well done, for you are being made, like the Captain of your salvation, perfect through suffering."

To be like Him, to get nearer and nearer to Him day by day. Surely it is a high calling, and one that we might all long for; and if it comes to us through suffering, we must not complain. You know that little bronze cross, the plainest of all decorations, yet the most coveted and thought of, that we call the "Victoria Cross." I sometimes think that suffering bravely borne, is a sort of Victoria Cross in itself, because it is as though CHRIST

singled us out for a post requiring special courage, and marked us with His very Cross of suffering, the one He bore Himself.

And so you see it is the standing still, the bearing, that counts highest in His book of honours. And there will come a day at last when we shall all stand before Him; and then, be sure, not one silent victory won on a sick bed, not one triumph of the Cross gained on the battlefield of suffering, will be unrewarded; for He has said—and He always keeps His word—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

III

What Jesus Christ came to Do

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—*S. John* iii. 16.

"He was wounded for our transgressions . . . and with His stripes we are healed."—*Isa.* liii. 5.

"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."—*S. Luke* xix. 10.

You have heard these words before, but have you ever quite realized their meaning and their bearing on your own life? I want you to try to do so to-day as you have never done before. I want you to take them, as God meant them, for yourself, and to think what a difference it would have made to you now, if God had never sent His Son down to live and to die for you. Now why did He come? and what did He do by coming?

One thing we are sure of—although He came willingly and gladly, He did not come to please Himself. "Even Christ pleased not Himself," said S. Paul, when he was trying to make his people unselfish, by urging them to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was the most unselfish Person Who ever lived.

He came, because in no other way could the price of our sins be paid, because by no other Sacrifice could our entrance into heaven be won.

The children's hymn puts the great truth very simply—

> "There was no other good enough
> To pay the price of sin;
> He only could unlock the gate
> Of heaven and let us in."

And because of this He left the holiness and the peace and the happiness of heaven, and exchanged it for earth, where sin jarred continually on His pure, sinless Soul; where are suffering and poverty and misery and strife. What a Sacrifice He made!

We shall never fully understand it until we stand face to face with Him, and He makes all things clear. Not till then shall we know the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of CHRIST, for it passes human knowledge. And for this—to win us pardon and a home in heaven—He was content to endure the Cross, to die the death of a criminal: for that was the punishment for criminals in those days. He was falsely accused, deserted by His friends, tortured and jeered at by His enemies, and finally, after hanging on the Cross three long hours, He faced and passed through death, crossed the unknown river, which we must all cross some day; and, whilst He went to Paradise, the home of

departed spirits, His Body lay in the grave three days.

This was the price He paid, then, to bring back His sheep to the fold—His children, you and me amongst them—to the FATHER'S house.

But that was not all He came for. If so, He could have gone straight to His Cross, and not spent thirty years on earth first. There were two more reasons for which He came. One was because He wanted to take our nature upon Him, and, in that way, to know all about our temptations and difficulties, and pains and sorrows; He wanted to be able to sympathize with us perfectly.

It has been truly said that the best leader is he who makes his men feel that he is also their comrade. You know that is true.

Is it not the officer who shares the dangers and hardships, whom his men will follow anywhere? whilst the one who spares himself, and shows no sympathy, has not half the influence with them. That was why our LORD JESUS CHRIST did not just sit on His throne and watch our struggles from a distance. He came down into the thick of the fighting Himself. As the Bible says, "The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering."

Perfect through suffering! If *He* had to suffer, surely we can too? He has been through it all before us; and when we are tempted, when we feel irritable and perverse

and discontented, let us remember He was tempted too—yet without sin. He can sympathize, and He can help.

And thirdly, He came to found His Church; and by His Church, you know, I don't mean a building of which He laid the first stone.

I mean by the words, the "Church of CHRIST," the whole body of Christian people —that multitude which no man can number, of all baptized people, who have been brought by Baptism into the Church of CHRIST, the family of GOD.

What a homely, restful sound it has! GOD's family—gathered from all countries and all nations, but one in Him; one, because, we acknowledge one LORD, one Faith, one Baptism; one, because we believe in GOD Who made us; in JESUS CHRIST, Who died for us and ever lives to help us: and in the HOLY GHOST, Who comes down to dwell in our hearts, to teach us GOD's will and to make us good.

Is not that a comforting thought?—that JESUS CHRIST lived and died for us on earth, not only to win pardon for our sins, but to draw us all into GOD's family, that there might be no outsiders, not one in all this vast universe, who is beyond the reach of His loving care. "Go ye," were His last words to His friends, "into all nations, and preach the Gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST." When you were

baptized, GOD took you into His arms; that was your second birth. You were born into your earthly father's family before, but at Baptism you were born anew into GOD'S family. He took you into His arms, just as an earthly father takes his new-born child into his arms, and gazes lovingly at it. So GOD took you; and never, never for one moment since, have you been forgotten or uncared for by Him. You forgot Him perhaps, you sinned against Him time after time, but He still remembered you.

This, then, is what CHRIST came down to earth to do for you—first, to buy your pardon, to wash away your sins in His own Blood shed for you on the Cross; secondly, to pass through all your temptations and difficulties, and to taste what human pain and weariness and weakness were like, so that He could sympathize with you entirely; and, thirdly, to make you a son of GOD, one of His own family; watched over here by His love, and one day to dwell with Him in His home for ever and ever. Oh, when you say your prayers to Him to-night, thank Him from your heart for all He has done and is doing for you, and ask Him to make you more worthy of it all.

IV

The Lesson of the Flowers

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field . . . shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." —*S. Matt.* vi. 28–33.

When our Lord was preaching and teaching, He often drew illustrations, to make His meaning clearer, from the natural everyday objects and scenes around Him. At one time, as He looked at the vineyards spread out over the sunny hillsides of Judea, He spoke of the vine-tree, and showed how He Himself is the Stem and we the branches; and how, only through keeping in touch with Him by prayer and Holy Communion, can we make sure of being healthy, fruitful branches, and not dead, useless ones. On another day, as He lifted up His eyes, they fell upon a sower, busy sowing his seed, and He began to speak of how God sows the good seed of His Word in

our hearts, and of the different ways different men receive it.

Thus our LORD JESUS CHRIST made His teaching *real* to His hearers, showing them how everything in nature speaks to us of GOD; and how the common, everyday things of life all belong to Him, and there is no part of our life that He does not think of and care for.

And we might feel quite sure that the flowers of the field, so dear to all who love the country and nature, as we may be certain He did, would not escape His notice. So He taught us a lesson from the flowers—a lesson for all people and all time—and one, I think, that should come specially home to you, who are ill; and to whom, most likely, flowers are one of the chief pleasures and brightnesses of life. Perhaps you have loved flowers all your life; but I hardly think you ever cared quite so much for them as you do now you are ill. Flowers seem to be GOD'S special messengers to sick people. Any one who has been in hospital would tell you it made all the difference in the world to the brightness of a ward, whether there were flowers there or not; and I have seen the light come into a sick man's eyes at the sight of flowers, that no other gift, however costly, would have brought there.

So much is this the case, that the Church now holds flower services for children; that the offering of flowers to GOD for His sick people may be made holy by prayers and

praises; and, after the service is over, the flowers brought by the children are sent on to hospitals and infirmaries, to gladden the inmates there. I cannot say exactly what message it is that the flowers bring to the sick. Perhaps, in one way, you know it better than I do, and yet you could not explain it in words. Somehow, they bring hope and brightness into your life, and make you forget for a moment that you are weak and tired and in pain. When GOD made the flowers He gave one of His best gifts to His children; and no one could ever count up or weigh the happiness and the comfort they have brought into the world.

And so it seems quite natural and right that our LORD JESUS CHRIST, when He was here, should have pointed us to the flowers of the field for one of His most beautiful and helpful lessons.

"Consider"—that is, look at—"the lilies . . . how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Solomon had been the greatest and richest of all the kings of Israel. There are wonderful accounts of the splendour of his reign, of his splendid palace and his ivory throne, and how everything was overlaid with gold—for "silver was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon." The Jews had read all about this in the history of their kings; and they

looked upon Solomon and his court as the height of all that was magnificent.

But is it not true that, when our LORD pointed to the flowers, and said that even Solomon in all his glory could not be compared to them, we can all see He was right? You, who love flowers so much, take just one of them and examine it carefully; and then tell me if the cleverest workman in the whole world, however highly he was paid, or however costly materials he was supplied with, could possibly manufacture anything so beautiful? No, we can do much with flowers—we can cultivate them so as to bring them to more variety, richer colours, greater perfection; but we cannot *make* them. GOD alone can "so clothe the grass of the field" as to astonish us with their beauty, and year by year send them forth afresh in their season, bearing their promise of the new life He has in store for us all some day, just as He is able to renew it every spring-time in the flowers and trees.

And He wants us to learn the same lesson from them that He taught to the people who stood around Him amongst the flowers of Judea all those years ago. If GOD so clothed the lilies, would He not much more clothe them? if GOD takes such care of the flowers, need we, who are of so much more value in His sight, have one minute's doubt about His love and care for us?

A time of sickness is very often also a time of anxiety. Expense always comes with illness,

and there is often less than usual to meet the expense. Perhaps, as well as your pain, you have to bear the doubts and fears as to the future that are sometimes even more wearing than bodily suffering. How is this and that expense going to be met? Shall I ever be able to earn a living again, and, if not, what is to become of me? If there are others dependent on you, if it is by your means that the home is kept together, the anxiety is even greater. Well, here is the answer to all these questions. The flowers have brought it to you. GOD knows all about it. He knows your anxieties; He knows your needs. He will care for you, not less, but a great deal more than He cares for the flowers of the field.

For see what our LORD says — "Your heavenly FATHER knoweth that ye have need of these things. Therefore, seek ye first the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

He wants you not to worry or make yourself miserable over worldly anxieties. He wants you to give your whole self to Him—mind and heart and body; to rest on Him and His love, and to look up to Him trustfully, like a little child to its father, trying to obey and submit entirely to His will for you, trusting and believing where you cannot see.

That is "seeking the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness"—trying to learn all the lessons He has sent this illness to teach you; and, if you do this, you may be sure the other

things will, in some way of His own, be added to you. He will provide for you and yours, just as He provides for the birds and flowers. So you are to take no thought about it, or rather, no *anxious* thought—for this is the true meaning of the words.

It is quite right to take thought beforehand; quite right for men to be in sick benefit clubs, and to put by, in any way they can, against the rainy day. But anxiety and worry indulged in are wrong, because they are doubting GOD'S love and His power to take care of and provide for His children.

It is quite true that illness makes the temptation to be anxious stronger in many cases. When the body is weak and suffering the mind is less able to bear any weight upon it; and there is so much time to think in the long hours of lying still. If you could be up and doing, a thousand other things would soon crowd out the worries. Besides, things that would be mere trifles if you were well, grow into mountains when you are weak and ill. Little discomforts—a noise in the room or outside, some trifle going wrong, a little bit of carelessness on the part of those about you—all these things perhaps vex and irritate you and disturb your peace of mind. Then is the time to stay your mind on GOD, and, by dwelling much on the thought of His care and goodness, drive away the other troublesome thoughts that do you harm, both soul and body.

So I want you to learn once more, from your flowers, the old, old lesson of GOD's love —nothing more; but it has a fresh message and fresh meaning at every stage of our life's journey; and you are at a stage now when you need it specially, and GOD specially wants you to learn it.

Don't look forward too much—live from day to day, and GOD will not only provide for your needs and the needs of those you love, but He will convince you more of His loving care for you than perhaps He could have done in your days of health and strength; and will lead you to an ever-growing confidence in Him.

V

The Prodigal Son

S. Luke xv. 11–32

This is one of the most wonderful and beautiful stories in the whole Bible, yet one of the simplest and easiest to understand. It was told by our Lord, just after He had been found fault with for having to do with sinners and outcasts. He wanted to show those who stood around Him that, although He hates sin, He loves the sinner; and that those who come to Him in true penitence He will in no wise cast out. And ever since, this simple story of the father and son has stood like a beacon of hope to men of all ages, a picture of that love of God that passes human understanding, pointing the sinful, and the disappointed, and the failures amongst men, to their only Help and Refuge.

It is so clear and so simple that it teaches its own lesson best, and there is very little that I can say to help you to understand it better. But I think the secret of getting real good out of reading the Bible is to apply it to our own lives, to find out its message for ourselves.

"What does God want to teach me from this?" we must ask ourselves, and if we ask it sincerely, we shall find the message there.

And there are just two or three thoughts that may help us to find it.

First, there is the great love of the father and the happy home he had made for his children. He longed to have them with him, to share their joys and sorrows, to keep them for his own, and that they might get to know him and his wonderful love for them better every day of their lives.

Just so God loves us, just so He wants us to live in constant touch with Him, to keep within His safe fold, the Church, so that all our lives may be guided and blessed and helped by Him. Just as the father wanted his son to sit at his table, and share the good food thereon, so God wants us to come to that best of all Feasts, that He prepares for us; and by partaking regularly of the Holy Communion, to share His very life, and grow stronger and better men and women by so doing. And not only this, but every day of our lives He wants us to bring our cares and difficulties to Him in prayer, like a child runs to its parents to consult them in everything.

I think God gives us this glimpse of what should have been the happiest of homes, just to show us what His Fatherhood really is; what life ought to be here for those who love and obey Him, and what it will be hereafter in that other home where we see Him as He

is, and understand the breadth and length and depth and height of His great love for us, which here we can only faintly realize. And then notice how, even when the son rejected the father, even when he thought he could get on without him, and take his own way, and be independent, and manage his life for himself; even then the father's love did not change.

All the time the son was away he missed him. The other son, however good and dutiful, did not take the place of the missing one, did not fill up the empty place at the fireside and the table that it hurt the loving, faithful heart to see day by day. And then, when, after all his foolishness and carelessness and ingratitude, he turned homewards at last, there was the same faithful untiring love waiting for him—no, more than that—coming to meet him, "when he was yet a great way off."

Just the same with ourselves. We forget GOD; but He does not forget us. We say we are independent and can live without Him; but His love follows us all the time; and none of His other children's love and dutifulness make up to Him for our neglect.

And when we once begin to turn to Him again He meets us half way. He does not say, like some earthly friends or fathers might, "I told you so—you have brought it on yourself: you have made your bed and you will have to lie on it."

He comes to meet us; He embraces us in the arms of His love, the love that has watched

and waited for us all this time, and says, "This My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

I suppose all of us have been prodigals. We have none of us cared for and served GOD as we should. We have all thought we could be independent, and left our FATHER'S home and neglected Him. The question for each one of us to ask ourselves is, How far have we wandered? How far have we been like the prodigal son in the story?

And when we have asked ourselves that question, let us remember how He adopted us into His family when we were baptized; how —to use the words of the Prayer Book in the Baptismal Service—"He embraced us with the arms of His mercy," and how He longed to keep us safe in that embrace. And then, when we would not have it, when we shook it off, as if it was nothing worth, and went our way, how little happiness it brought us! Just as the prodigal son found only disappointment, so surely have we! For a time, perhaps, we thought we were happy; but it was an empty, profitless sort of happiness all the time, and when trouble or anxiety, or sickness, or poverty came, what was there to fall back upon? Nothing surely, except that great unchanging love—the love we had forgotten, but it had not forgotten us. And so we said, or if we have not, let us say it now, "I will arise and go to my FATHER." "FATHER"—how kind and comforting the word sounds! Just as the

little child runs to its father for comfort, if it is hurt or frightened, so let us go, just as we are, without waiting for anything, straight back to our FATHER'S arms. Let no fears of being unfit stop us. The prodigal son went, just as he was, straight from the swine-herd, in his rough and ragged condition. And so may we; and directly He sees us turning, He will come to meet us. While we, in our bitter remorse and misery, feel still "a great way off," He is on His way to meet and to reassure us, to tell us it is not too late, that He is only longing to receive and to welcome us home.

VI

Life Renewed

"Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—*2 Cor.* iv. 16–18, R.V.

Some of the most comforting and cheering words in the whole Bible have been spoken and written by those who had much to suffer themselves: and that is one of the surest proofs, I think, that suffering comes for a good purpose; that God sends it in love; and that, when the sufferer takes it in the right way, it brings him nearer to God, and makes him stronger and purer and better than before.

The words I have just read to you were written by S. Paul, that brave servant of Christ, who perhaps had as much to suffer for the Master as any. Christ called him to go out and teach others to be Christians, to tell them about Christ and His love.

And that was at a time when to be a Christian was to be in danger of one's life.

S. Paul did live in danger of his life for

years. Then he had to suffer long months of imprisonment, and finally he was killed by the enemies of the Christian religion. We know, too, that during his lifetime he had bad health, which must have made everything harder to bear. But his courage never failed, and why? Firstly, because he loved and trusted his Master, JESUS CHRIST. And when we really love and trust any one, we feel (don't we?) that we can bear and do anything for them. That was how S. Paul felt. He could bear persecution, and pain, imprisonment, shame, dishonour, so long as he knew it was for the sake of his LORD and Master; and that, by bearing it, he was upholding the truth that CHRIST came to bring to men. "I do count all things but loss," he said, "for the excellency of the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS my LORD."

And secondly, S. Paul had realized the great truth that this life, and anything of trouble or pain that may happen to us in it, is of much less importance than that other life that will last for ever and ever; so he was able to set the right value on both, and to look upward and onward, even in the darkest hours, to what lay beyond.

And we must always remember that that life begins here.

Listen to what he says again:—"For though our outward man is decaying, our inward man is renewed day by day."

You see he speaks of the two natures in the one man, the outward nature and the inward

nature. There are two parts in every man—the outward part, the part that walks about the streets, and goes to work, and is all that strangers and outsiders know of us. And there is the inward man, the life that GOD sees, the life that will never end. It is the inward man that loves and believes in and prays to GOD, that is guided and helped day by day by GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT; and that, if it is strong and healthy, increases instead of decreases in power and vigour as the man grows older. You see, it is quite independent of the outward bodily life. Often a man may be strong and healthy and vigorous in the eyes of the world, but his inward or spiritual life may be so weak as to be almost dead. He never thinks about GOD, nor prays to Him, nor tries to please Him, in fact he is not quite sure if he believes in GOD at all, and does not very much care. What is that man's life worth? Not very much in the sight of GOD. He is making no preparation for the life to come. His outward life must end one day, and what has he to look forward to then? On the other hand, we may see a man in weak bodily health, unable to work, his bodily frame worn out and suffering; and yet his spiritual life may be strong and free. His faith in GOD'S love and mercy, his knowledge of CHRIST, may be growing stronger and fuller every day; and so, as S. Paul says, "though his outward man is decaying, his inward man is renewed." What a beautiful thought it is!

Have you ever noticed in the middle of winter, when the trees have lost their leaves, and everything looks dead and cold, how, when you examine the boughs and twigs nearer, you find the buds for next year all over them, waiting for the first early spring sunshine to swell and bring them on, and later to turn them into leaf and blossom?

Even so it is with the spiritual life of man. Hidden from the rude gaze of the world, it is growing and increasing, one day to gain perfection in those sunny fields of Paradise, that GOD has prepared for it.

That was the life that S. Paul knew was safe from the hands of his enemies. That was the life they could not touch, though they could kill his body. So he was able to write these brave cheerful words to his friends, even in his worst times of trouble. And he bade them remember, too, that their suffering here was only a little thing compared with the happiness GOD has in store for those who love Him. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." Our light affliction. It does not seem very light to us sometimes. There are times when we are nearly weighed down by it. But S. Paul, even in the midst of his weight of trouble, felt that it was nothing compared with the weight of the happiness in store. He could not have felt that, I think, unless that happiness had already begun for him. And it is the same

with us. It is only the inward spiritual life, the life that is lived here by those who love God, that can bear a man up through the troubles of this world. It is like the life-buoy, which in spite of the winds and storms, still keeps safe on the surface of the water; and the man who clings to it is saved from drowning.

And how does the verse end?

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal [which means mortal—coming to an end]; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

That is the key to it all. We must have faith, and we must ask God to make our faith strong enough to care more for the eternal things that we *cannot* see, than for the passing things that we *can* see.

I have heard a story of a little girl who called to her father in the dark from the top of a flight of steps. He came to the foot of the steps and called her: "Jump, Mary; I am here, and will catch you in my arms." The child did not hesitate a moment. She knew her father's voice, and with a child's simple trust, she jumped into the dark and was in the next instant safe in her father's arms. That is the sort of faith we want, to be able to trust God's love and care without seeing Him; and to believe His promises to us in the Bible so absolutely, that the unseen

things become as real to us as the things we see with our eyes every day around us.

Only we must accustom ourselves to thinking about these things. You know how it is with our earthly sight; we have to use it in order to make it useful. A man trains his eye by shooting at a target. As he gets used to looking along his gun, he learns how to aim. And don't you know how it is when you go out of a dark room into the bright sun, or again from the sunshine into the dark, you feel almost blind at first, but in a few minutes your eyes get used to the change and you begin to see clearly again what was all misty before.

So try to accustom your mind to think about GOD; and, as you look up to Him, He will come near to you. And so, like that brave, trusting man, S. Paul, writing his letters from the prison so full of cheer and hope to his friends outside, you will have a peace and joy that many strong, healthy people have never even tasted, and you will, like S. Paul, help others by your patient courage and faith.

"O strengthen me, that while I stand,
Firm on the rock and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a helping hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea."

VII

LOOKING TO THE HILLS

"The hills stand about Jerusalem: even so standeth the LORD round about His people, from this time forth for evermore."—*Ps.* cxxv. 2.

PROTECTION—strong, reliable, unfailing; surrounding and holding him fast; that was what the man felt who wrote those words, as he looked out of his window in Jerusalem of old, and saw the great hills standing round the city, and knew that just so GOD stands around His own. You who have lived amongst hills in India or South Africa can understand these words better than any one who had never been out of London, or had lived all his days in a flat country. Don't you know how, as you look at those great peaks towering up to the sky, perhaps crowned with the snow that hardly ever melts in those high regions, a solemn sort of feeling comes over you at times—a sense of your own littleness and helplessness; and perhaps, too, if you ever had thoughts of GOD at all, a sense of His nearness, of His power and majesty, represented, as it were, by those great splendid mountains.

Certainly, mountains give a feeling of pro-

tection, as they stand, like great strong sentinels, barring the road, and circling us round with their quiet, reassuring strength. You know how often they are used in warfare as a position of strength or as a bulwark against the enemy—far better than any fortress built by human hands. And I think this picture of Jerusalem lying safe amongst her hills reminds us of a sleeping camp, resting, perhaps, after a hard day's marching or fighting, whilst the sentries keep guard all the time. *They* must not sleep, as you know, though their comrades may. It is for them to wake and watch and give the alarm if the need for it occurs.

Even so the LORD, standing round about His people, neither slumbers nor sleeps.

That is the thought I want you to have to-day—GOD'S never-failing watchfulness and protection. Nothing makes us want protection so much as the sense of weakness; and that is just what GOD has sent you just now. You cannot work as you used to do—no, not even walk across the room without feeling tired. It is very hard to bear sometimes, this utter weakness. Even when you are free from pain, there is always that to bear, and *how* hard it is for a man who has been strong and active and athletic in his time, only GOD knows.

But it has been said, and very truly too, that when GOD takes something away from us with one hand, He gives us something else

with the other; and so, when He took away your health and strength, it was to teach you to trust more in His strength, and so help you to find a peace that you did not possess even in your healthy, active days; for only in that strength—not in our own—shall we find rest.

You know how, when you have a bad night or a bad day, you sometimes turn and twist about from one position to another, and not one of them gives you any rest or freedom from pain and discomfort. And as with your body so with your mind—there are times when you are wretched and depressed and hopeless about yourself, anxious about others; and the more you turn things over in your mind and try to see an opening—a way out of it all—the more mixed up and restless you feel, till you wish you could somehow lose consciousness and forget. But a great man once said that "GOD created us for Himself, and our souls are bound to be restless till they rest in Him."

Not in our own thoughts, not in ourselves or in earthly friends *can* we find it—only in Him.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." So David speaks in another of his Psalms. And once again, you see, it was to the hills round Jerusalem, that he loved so well, that he looked for help and comfort. He had a great deal of trouble in his life. Those whom he loved and had tried to help turned against him. His own favourite son rebelled, and was ungrateful and cruel; and before he could see

him or the quarrel could be made up, the son had died a violent death, and David mourned bitterly for him. His own life was often in danger, and he had to be always on his guard against enemies. But it was not for an army coming to help him that he looked up to the hills. The help he wanted was from GOD Himself, Who set those hills in their places on purpose to remind us of His protection and power and love. That was the thought and the only thought that helped him—that, whatever life brought of bitterness and disappointment, there was one Friend Who never failed, one Love that is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.

And so, even though you may have no hills to look at from the window of your sick room, only chimney pots, or perhaps trees, you, too, can, in a way, lift up your eyes to the hills.

You can lift up your thoughts to the loving FATHER, Who, though He allows you to be weak and suffering, yet sees through it all some good, far beyond health and strength, that He has planned for you. You can put aside the worldly anxious thoughts that bring you no relief, and cast yourself once and for all on the protecting, surrounding love of GOD. And so, whichever way your illness ends, you will know it is not your business or care to decide. It is in His hands, Who cares for you more than I can attempt even to tell you, and Who simply bids you trust; and one day He will make it all clear.

VIII

Taking up the Cross

"He began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed. . . . And He said unto them, Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."—*S. Mark* viii. 31, 34.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—*S. John* xvi. 33.

I want you to think to-day about some more of those memorable words which our Lord spoke to His disciples, but which were not meant only for them, but for you and me and all His people. The time was drawing on; and before long the great work He came to do would have its end in His death for us all on the Cross. He knew all about this beforehand, so it came as no surprise to Him. That is one thing He bore that He does not ask us to bear. We do not know about our trouble and pain before the time comes. The trouble of your life, this illness, with all its pain and weariness and long days and nights of suffering, you did not know of it before He sent it to you. If you had, it would have hung

like a cloud over your past life; it would have prevented you from being happy and light-hearted as you used to be; and it might even have unsettled you, and made you unable to do the duty and play the part GOD had marked out for you. No; He leads us on very gently from one day to the next; and we do not have to bear the sorrow or the pain before it comes. But with Him it was different. He knew all His life what He had to face. He knew one of His disciples was going to prove false, and betray Him into the hands of His enemies. He knew His friends would forsake Him and flee just when He needed them most; He knew the people whom He had tried all His life to help were going to turn against Him, and beg that He might be crucified.

I have seen a picture of the Child JESUS in His earthly home—the carpenter's shop at Nazareth—in which the shadow of the Cross has suddenly fallen across the floor, as if to remind His earthly parents that their Boy, even amid the happy, free life of a village lad, had before Him the great work of the salvation of the world; and that they must not be surprised when the time came for Him to go to His Cross.

How hard it must have made His daily life to have this always before Him! But He never flinched. He was just as unselfish and loving and thoughtful for other people and their trouble as if He had not Himself to face the bitterest trial man ever had to undergo.

And in the words I have been reading to you, He was trying to break the news very gently to His friends. This was not an easy matter, and I will tell you why. In those days the Jews were looking for the coming of our LORD on earth, which had been foretold to them years ago by the prophets GOD had sent amongst them. Meantime, however, their country had been conquered by the Romans, a great and mighty nation of warriors who were then practically masters of the world. Now, the Romans were not only very powerful but very rich; and as they grew richer, they grew more fond of show and magnificence and display. They loved fine clothes, and a soft, easy life. Poverty and suffering were things they not only despised and hated, but tried to keep out of sight. So that the Jews had come to look on all this pomp, and show, and power, and riches, as part of a great kingdom; and their idea was, that when the promised Saviour came, He would come as a great King, far removed from such things as suffering, and poverty, and humility. They imagined Him coming with power, greater than that of the Romans, and that He would conquer them in turn, and set up an earthly kingdom, with Himself as Head.

Thus, when our LORD was born into the world as the Son of working people: when He moved about from village to village on foot, with no grand train of courtiers, only a few poor fishermen who believed on His

word: when, instead of living with the rich and great, He chose rather the dwellings of the poor and humble, and went about doing good amongst the sick and suffering and despised, it upset all the ideas they had held about the coming of the Saviour. They had yet to learn that riches are not the only power in this world; that humility is greater than pride; that suffering bravely borne is one of the grandest and noblest things in the whole world; and that poverty and weakness, when they are lit up by faith in GOD, and submission to His will, are of far more worth in His sight than the success and satisfied ambitions of worldly men.

And so, as He steadfastly looked onward to His own Cross, He began gradually to teach His friends, that, if they were to be true followers of Him, they too must be bearers of the Cross; they must not expect an easy, smooth sort of life if they were to belong to Him. To tell them that would have been to put them under a complete misunderstanding and deception from the beginning. And sure enough they found His words true. Not long after JESUS Himself was crucified the persecution of His followers began; and, one by one, most of them, after hard and difficult lives, lived amongst constant dangers and anxieties, gave up their lives for their Master, and were numbered in that "noble army of martyrs," who have followed in His footsteps and faced death for His sake. And though we are not called

now to suffer death for the Christian Faith, GOD still calls us to bear the Cross, and we must not expect to live without it. His words about taking up the Cross were spoken to us too. Supposing that when you were starting on a hard campaign (such as the one you have been through), your general had said to you, "I promise you, you shall have no dangers to encounter, no hardships to endure, everything shall be smooth and easy for you," would it have been a wise or right thing to say? No, indeed! You would soon have found his words to be false; and then you would never have trusted him as a leader again.

But if he had said, "We have this and this task set us to do. We have that position to take—that body of the enemy to clear away —that town to relieve, and we must do it; we have difficulties and hardships, wounds and perhaps death to face; but I know you are brave enough for that, and we will just face them together and do our duty, come what may."

Those are the words of the true leader, are they not? Those are the words you would have answered with the ringing cheer, such as soldiers know how to give; and you would have been braced up for the work that lay before you, and ready to bear and do whatever he asked you.

Such a leader is our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

He does not encourage us with false hopes; but He gives us the far better encouragement

of promising us that, when the trial comes, He will be with us. He never told us we should be free from sorrow and pain and suffering in this world: but He did promise us that, as our days, so should our strength be; that when He sent the trouble, He would send the courage and the patience to bear it. He does not send out His soldiers unarmed into the battle. He gives them the weapons of faith and prayer, and Sacrament; and, besides that, He gives them the promise that victory is certain if they will be true to Him. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." He does not disguise it or hide it; He points to the shadow of the Cross, as it were, lying across the onward path we have to tread, but He adds, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." I have overcome; I have been through it all before you; I am not asking you to bear what I have not borne Myself; I know it all, the racking pain, the utter weariness, the low spirits, the fears, and the loneliness, and the bitterness, that you can tell to no earthly friend; but, be of good cheer—I have overcome these very things; I have passed through them to a far grander and more glorious victory than earthly king ever won. And you, who are now sharing the Cross with Me, shall hereafter share My crown. Be of good cheer. Take comfort, for all shall yet be well; even through the tears of sorrow, or pain, or weakness, look up to Me, Who am looking down with a smile to see you so brave and patient.

'Hold the fort' just a little longer, and the relief will come. You too shall be one of that victorious army, battle-stained and yet triumphant, that I am gathering day by day round Me in the peace and joy of Paradise."

IX

The Soldier's Faith

S. Matt. viii. 5–14

This is a wonderful story of faith, and one that should specially appeal to soldiers, because the man who showed such faith that he was one of the few to be honoured by special praise from our Lord Jesus Christ *was* a soldier: a Roman soldier, too, stationed in Jerusalem, a foreign country, conquered and garrisoned by the Romans. The Romans were heathens; they knew nothing about God; and probably this man knew nothing until he happened to come into this country of the Jews, and, through living amongst them, came to hear something of the truth. The Jews had been God's chosen people. They had known about Him and had been taught and cared for by Him for hundreds of years. He had sent them messengers, wise men to lead them, prophets to tell them what was going to happen in future years; and the most important event that they foretold was the coming of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. They were always told to look forward to that—the

coming of a Saviour, Who was to be born into the world to save His people from their sins. And now He had actually come. JESUS CHRIST the SON of GOD was really walking their streets and fields day by day, working miracles, speaking words of comfort and hope, words also of warning that men should repent before it was too late; that now was the day of salvation, now the time to turn to GOD in penitence and faith, and to come to hear from His SON'S lips the words of eternal life.

And yet the greater number of the Jews refused to believe Him. In the words of the Bible, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Most of the Jews of to-day still refuse to believe Him. They worship GOD, and they believe in the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments; but the New Testament—the best part of the Bible, with its story of our LORD'S life on earth, and all the wonderful, new, helpful, comforting teaching He came to bring, both in His own words and in the words of His disciples, who carried on that teaching by His orders—all this they will have nothing to do with.

Think how disappointing it must have been for our LORD to be rejected like this by His own people! They were the very ones who should have welcomed Him most; but their pride and stubbornness got in the way, and met Him at every turn. No wonder, near the end of His life, when He looked down on the beautiful city of Jerusalem, and thought

of the great opportunity its people had missed, that He wept over it, and used those sad words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

They had missed their great opportunity; they had put aside the greatest love that ever was; and such a thought is always a sad one —a chance lost never to come again! a great happiness within our reach and missed through our own fault! That is one of the most bitter thoughts a man can have; and no words are sadder than the words "Too late." May it never be so with us, especially in the opportunities GOD gives us to love and know Him better!

So it is pleasant to see, after these sad pictures of JESUS CHRIST refused and rejected by His own people, how this Roman soldier, who had had so much fewer chances of knowing and believing, *did* believe, and came to our LORD for help. His servant, probably a soldier too, was ill; and like the kind master he was, he was in trouble about him, and wanted to get relief for him if he could. In his position, as the representative of the Roman Government, keeping order in the conquered province, he was bound to come often in contact with the Jewish people; and his simple, soldierly nature had been attracted and drawn towards the teaching of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. Some people seem to think that our LORD'S was

a rather soft, woman-like kind of nature. But such a character in a man would never have attracted a soldier; and the fact that the Roman centurion believed so completely in our LORD and in His power to do mighty works proves very surely what a truly manly Man JESUS CHRIST must have been: the sort of man whom other men trust and look up to, and who influences them for good. A soldier is used to taking orders and looking a duty straight in the face. He likes plain speaking, and is used to having right and wrong called by their true names, and to bending his will to the will of another. So, unlike the haughty Jewish rulers, who loved their own way, and were jealous of any rule except their own, the centurion saw that JESUS wanted to help men when He told them of their faults; and that this new Teacher, with His straight words about sin, and His strong, earnest warnings about death and judgement and the world to come, was not only the right Man to listen to, but, more than a man—the Almighty SON of GOD, Who alone is able to help and to save.

And now, see how he shows his faith!—he takes the trouble to go and look for JESUS; to find Him out, and to beg Him to heal his servant. That is what we must do—we must take our troubles straight to JESUS; and, be sure, He will not cast us out, any more than He did the centurion.

And now notice, though he is a man of authority, and JESUS is, to outward appear-

ance, only a poor man, the son of a carpenter, he is full of humility. "LORD, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof."

Many a man in his position would have said just the reverse.

JESUS, we are told, was often without a shelter at all. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

Many a man in a less position than this Roman officer would have refused to entertain Him, would have thought Him too mean and low to enter his house. But the centurion was just the other way—he was not worthy to receive JESUS, he said; and see what he says next, for it should come home to a soldier—"I am a man under authority." "I am," he means, "a man used to taking orders and to giving them. I say to a man, Do this, and it is done; I tell another to go or come, and he goes or comes accordingly. If I can give orders and get them carried out, how much more can you, the LORD of heaven and earth, make my servant well by one effort of your will, one movement of your hand." Such was his belief, you see, in the power of JESUS. He did not hesitate about believing; he did not say, "I will go thus far and no farther"—He went the whole way, as I think soldiers like to do, in giving their affection and their confidence. He believed entirely. He felt that JESUS could do anything and every-

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN
GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

thing He willed to do, and he prayed the simple, soldierly prayer, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."

That is what we all ought to do—to trust Him more completely; to believe He is both able and willing to help us, whatever the trouble may be, even if there seems to be no cure for it; to cast our care more entirely upon Him, knowing that He cares more than any one else can possibly do about us.

But perhaps all this time you are thinking—"Yes, of course it is a help and comfort to know about the love of JESUS, and I do believe in it, but I cannot come in the same way as the Roman soldier and so many others did, in the days when He was on earth, because He no longer works miracles of healing, and no longer makes people well and strong all in a moment like He did then."

Yes, that is true; but I think He can help us even better now.

In those days people came—we read of how they came—just out of curiosity sometimes, to see the wonderful works; and went away without getting very much good out of what they had seen. Once, as we know, He healed ten sick men all at one time, and only one out of the ten stayed even to thank Him for his healing. It was those who came in faith who really got lasting good; and JESUS always gave them to understand that their souls mattered more than their bodies; that when He gave them health and strength

bodies, He gave them a far greater gift in forgiving their sins, and helping them to know Him better and to lead a good life as His true followers.

Don't you think that Roman soldier gained something even better and more lasting than his servant's health by coming to our LORD that day? Don't you think his whole after life must have been different, lived in the memory of the day when he first became the personal friend of JESUS CHRIST, and learned to know Him and walk in the light of that knowledge for ever?

And this is what you may do, for you know far more than the centurion did. He was only a heathen from a heathen country, groping after the truth, and finding it at last in CHRIST. You are a baptized Christian—a member of the Church, the great family of JESUS CHRIST; living in a Christian country; and with opportunities of hearing all the wonderful story of His love. Yes; and He has better gifts for you than even the healing of that poor frail body—gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT, of peace, and hope, and comfort, that you might never have known had it not been for the pain and suffering that He has allowed you to have too. Meanwhile, do not think for one moment that He does not care for your bodily pain as well. No, indeed; He is just as full of pity and sympathy as ever for all the sufferings of His faithful soldiers; and there is not a sigh or a groan that He does not hear, not a tear of

pain and weakness that He does not see and care for.

Take to yourself that beautiful truth—"There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven."

And then, in the same simple faith as the soldier of old, bring Him all your trouble, and He will answer your prayers in His own best way, and strengthen your faith day by day; till at last faith is needed no longer, because you will behold Him face to face, and learn at His feet in Paradise all the meaning of the pain and all the wonders of His love.

X

Prayer

"Ask, and it shall be given you. . . . What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"—*S. Matt.* vii. 7, 9–11.

In these words our Lord was teaching His people to pray. It was one of the greatest, perhaps *the* greatest lesson He ever taught us. Men cannot get on without prayer. It has always been natural to men to pray. Even the heathen, who know not the true God, yet know and make their petitions to their false ones. And we, who know better, even the most careless amongst us, who forget God when things go well with us; when trouble comes, when we are in distress or anxiety, do not our thoughts, almost without our knowing it, turn to God in prayer? There is surely hardly a man or woman who has not breathed the words, "God help me," in moments of dire necessity or distress.

And now see what our Lord Jesus Christ said about prayer. Until He came on earth men had thought of God as a great and

mighty Being, far away above them, Who ordered everything in heaven and earth, and was both just and merciful, but to Whom sinful men could not approach near. But when JESUS CHRIST came, Who was both GOD and Man, and brought with Him the message of the New Testament, He taught men to look upon GOD in a new and different light. He came to be a link between GOD and ourselves, to throw a bridge across the great gulf that separates heaven from earth; and He taught us that we must come to GOD in prayer, just like children come to their father, and ask him for the good things he loves to give them. And so He drew this illustration, this picture of the father and son in human life, and said, Which of you, if his son ask a loaf of him, will give him a stone? or a fish, will give him a serpent?

"Is it likely," He meant, "that any father would answer the request of his children in such a way? And if the love of earthly fathers is so great—if an earthly father takes a pleasure in satisfying his children's wants—what about GOD, the only perfect FATHER? Will He refuse?"

And so in many other places, He teaches the same truth.

"Ask, and it shall be given unto you."

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

He is inviting us to bring our needs to GOD. He is promising us that if we ask in faith He will always hear and answer.

Now have we used our opportunities as we ought to have done in this? I am afraid not.

There are a good many lives being lived, even in this Christian country of ours, that are almost prayerless lives. What a lot of help those people are missing, both for themselves and for others! It is like a soldier letting his weapon get rusty for want of use, the very weapon he needs to defend himself. It is like a key rusting in a lock, the lock of a door that gives access to all sorts of useful and valuable things, that cannot be got at till the key is turned.

Have we been amongst those who have thus wasted our opportunities?

Have we prayed to GOD as we ought to have done?

Remember, He listens for His children's prayers, He longs to hear them, and answer them; and when one of us fails to pray, He misses that one, and no other quite makes up to Him for it.

I think, most likely, since you have been ill, you have prayed to GOD more than ever in your life before.

That is one of the good parts of suffering, it throws men back on the great realities, the things that really matter; it reminds them of GOD and of their souls; it teaches many a man to pray. I am sure GOD has been glad and happy to hear those prayers of yours. He is such a kind FATHER. He comes more than half way to meet His children, when

they turn towards Him. He says, "While they are yet speaking I will hear."

And be sure that the time you spend in prayer, during these long hours you have to lie in pain and weakness, are some of the most valuable times of your whole life: for prayer draws us near to GOD.

Just as we get to know an earthly friend by talking to him and writing to him, so we get to know GOD in prayer.

GOD is our Friend, and we get to be greater friends with Him most of all through our prayers.

And there are just a few things to be remembered about prayer, especially as to your prayers now during this long illness. The first is, I think, this; that we need not have stated times for prayer. Some people think that a prayer in the evening is enough. But this is a mistake. When the long day with its difficulties, and temptations, and suffering is before us, we want GOD'S help to take us through. Of course we want it again when night is coming, with its long hours of darkness, sometimes the worst hours for a sick man. But that is not all. We must look up to GOD constantly during the day, and make our requests to Him. He is always ready to listen, and we must always be ready to pray. People don't do this half enough in their busy working lives. It is not necessary to kneel down always to pray to GOD, though we must do that for our regular times of prayer, if we

are well and able to do so. A man can pray as he goes along the street, as he sits at his desk, or as he drives his horse, or uses his spade, or whatever it may be. A sick man, especially, has many opportunities during the day to look up to God and pray to Him. For prayer is the breath of life—the life of our souls, just as breathing is the life of our bodies. It has been said that a man cannot go to his window and open it for five minutes to breathe in the morning, and then say that that amount of breathing will last him for the day. The air from the window may be very good, but he must breathe wherever he is; there must be air at other times for him to take in and live by. And so with prayer. The more we pray the more we shall want to pray. It will be, as I said before, like talking to a friend, to do which comes quite naturally to us at any time and in any place.

And secondly, remember that nothing is too small to take to God. He cares so much for you, so He cares too for everything that concerns you. Take everything to Him and tell Him about it. He knows it all already, but that does not matter. A father likes to hear about his child's joys and sorrows, even if he knew of them before. He is never tired of listening, and it is good for you to tell Him. Tell Him about the pain, and how hard it is to be patient. Tell Him about the weakness, and how hard it is to be cheerful. Tell Him about the temptations to be irritable and dis-

contented, and how much you want to be brave and steadfast, but that you need His help at every turn.

Tell Him, too, how you have sinned against Him in past days, and how you have forgotten and neglected Him; and ask His forgiveness. Tell Him your worries and anxieties, whether small or great, whether about yourself or those you love. Nothing is too small, nothing is too insignificant and trifling for telling to Him. For He is your FATHER, and He loves you and understands you, and that is enough. Then thirdly, let us always remember that although GOD hears and answers all prayers, He does not always give us the things we ask for. What you want more than anything is relief from your pain, your health and strength back again. And you are quite right to pray for it day by day. But it must be a prayer like our LORD JESUS CHRIST'S prayer, when He asked to be spared the bitter agony of the Cross. He *did* ask to be spared it, and so may we; but He added, "Not My will, but Thine be done," and so must we. An earthly father does not give his child all it asks for, for he knows better what is good for it than the child does. And it is the same with GOD. If He does not give us what we ask for, be sure He will give us something much better; and one day we shall understand why the thing we asked for was refused. But our prayers are heard just the same; yes, they are answered; only not always in the way we hope or expect.

And lastly, don't let us be selfish in our prayers. Let us say a prayer for others as well as ourselves. Let us pray for those we love, and those who have been kind to us; that GOD will help them according to their need. Yes; and we must pray as our LORD JESUS CHRIST did, for those who have been unkind to us too, those who have sinned against us, perhaps, and caused us unhappiness. We must ask GOD to forgive them, and make them sorry, and lead them to better things. Nothing helps us to forgive people more than praying for them. If we pray for people, the hard, bitter thoughts we have of them are bound to grow less; so those prayers do us good, as well as those we pray for; for a sick man should have no hard unforgiving thoughts at all. You, as a soldier, had many enemies at one time, and you may be suffering even now from the effects of the war they caused. Pray for them too; and you will be following your great Captain JESUS CHRIST'S example, and doing His work.

One might go on to mention many more who need your prayers—others who are sick and suffering like yourself, or poor, or sad, or tempted to do wrong—that GOD will help and relieve and defend them all, and turn their troubles into good, and bring them nearer to Him. Our soldiers abroad and at home, all of them have a special claim on your prayers in their many temptations and dangers, which you have experienced yourself. And the mis-

sionaries in those very heathen lands which you have helped to guard, and perhaps even to conquer for Britain, and who are working, often in loneliness, and poverty, and danger, to conquer them now for CHRIST, and bring them the light of His teaching.

See what a wonderful opportunity you have to help others! I have heard of a poor crippled boy who had to lie on his back for years. He had a friend who used to go and see him, and who taught him that his life need not be a useless or an idle one, so long as he could pray for others. So she used to tell him of all sorts of people he might pray for; and as he lay there, year after year, his life was full of interest; and his prayers rose up to GOD and helped—how many lives we shall never know, until we hear it on the Judgement Day, when all the good or the evil we have done will be made clear.

Don't you think it is a wonderful thought, this power of prayer that GOD has put in our hands, and which you can use just as well, perhaps better, in your weakness and helplessness, than many a busier man or woman outside? For you can touch the very ends of the earth through your prayers; they go straight up from your sick room to the loving, listening ear of GOD, and be sure He will hear and answer them; and perhaps some life far away from here will be touched and helped by your intercessions, your prayers to GOD for others; some tempted soul will he held back

from doing wrong, some sad heart cheered, some fellow-sufferer helped to be patient.

And one more thing. You are often tired and in pain yourself. You don't feel like saying long prayers. Then just look up to GOD as a child looks up to its father: say, "Thou knowest, LORD; look down on me, as I look up to Thee, give me the help I need, and help those for whom I ought to pray." Or say the LORD'S prayer, just the "Our FATHER" that you learned when you were a child. GOD understands, and He does not expect more than you can give. It is the spirit of prayer, the upward look, He wants from you. Two words of real earnest prayer, are worth many long prayers that have less reality in them. And JESUS CHRIST is standing at the right hand of GOD to pray for us, so He will fill up the blanks.

But I think you will find that, little by little, prayer gets easier to you; and that you will feel more and more, as the days go on, that you *must* pray. And so your prayers will be like a chain, ever drawing you, and those you love and pray for, nearer to GOD; until at last you see Him and speak with Him face to face in Paradise.

XI

Holy Communion

I

I HAVE spoken often to you of the love of GOD, but I cannot speak of it too often: because, however much we try to realize it, we shall never know quite all it means. S. Paul said when he wrote to the friends he had taught and loved, that that was his first and greatest wish for them—that they should learn more and more of the love of GOD, which "passeth knowledge." "Passeth knowledge"—you see he knew it was past their understanding, and past his; that we shall never quite understand it, till we see GOD face to face in heaven.

And now I want to speak to you about a mark of GOD's love that He wants to show you—I mean, inviting you to receive the Holy Communion.

How do we first find out that our earthly friends love us? Not by their telling us so. Words are worth very little in comparison to deeds. We know it by what they do for us. If they take trouble about us, come a long way to see us, make plans for our

happiness and comfort, and take pains to carry them out—then we feel sure of their love, that they really do care about us, and think of us even when they are away from us.

Now let us think how the Holy Communion was first instituted; how it first came to be the greatest service of the Church. It was the day before Good Friday, that first Good Friday of all, when our LORD JESUS CHRIST hung upon the Cross three hours for our salvation, and died that we might live for ever. He knew all that was coming upon Him. He knew how His friends were going to forsake Him that very night, and leave Him to the mercy of His enemies. He knew He was going to be mocked, and spat upon, and scourged. He knew He was going to be nailed to the Cross and hang there for three hours, the gazing-stock of the crowd, till He died a lingering death of pain and misery.

One would have thought, with all that on His mind, He would not have had much time to think of other things or other people. Yet it was that very last night that He had set His mind so steadfastly on celebrating that Last Supper with His friends.

He wanted them, through that, to understand that this was not an end but a beginning; that His death on the Cross was to be the means of drawing all men to Him, and of uniting them to Himself and to one another, in one great family which we call the Church. This Last Supper was to be a sign and pledge

that He wished to gather His children together, just as an earthly father loves to gather his children round his table, and have them all near him.

And it was to be more than that—it was not only to be celebrated once, you see. What did our LORD say to His disciples that night? —"This do in remembrance of Me"; and "As often as ye eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye do show the LORD'S death till He come." "Till He come!" And so, ever since, the Church has gone on celebrating Holy Communion; and so we shall go on celebrating It, till our LORD JESUS CHRIST comes, at last, as we know He will come, again. And each time we celebrate Holy Communion we remind GOD, as it were, that JESUS CHRIST died for us, and plead to Him for forgiveness and salvation, because He died to win them. And, at the same time, when we touch and receive the Bread and Wine, we touch and receive JESUS CHRIST; we get closer to Him, and He comes down to help us; and, if we believe this, we shall come away stronger and happier and better.

Of course, Holy Communion is a great Mystery. We can never fully understand it, however hard we try; and now that you are weak and ill, even if you have not learned much about it before, there is no need for you to trouble and puzzle your head to understand it.

It is as though GOD said to you—"My dear

child, I want to give you a great gift—I want to give you something better than healing for the body; I want to give health to your soul, to give it My very own life, the life that never ends, the life that is only just beginning here, the life that no earthly disease nor poverty nor suffering can touch, and that will go on and on without a break through eternity. I don't ask you to understand this; I only ask you to believe."

Is not this a loving invitation! There is surely nothing to shrink back from here. All He asks of us is *repentance*—being sorry for our past sins and desiring earnestly to do better—and *faith*, which means trust in His love and forgiveness, and power to help us.

I have heard of an army officer, who, when his company was to go under fire, always paraded them and read prayers. After that they must have felt stronger for what was before them, because GOD'S blessing was on them and their cause; and also because their captain had inspired them with his own strength and courage. And so, I think, Holy Communion is like a gathering round our Leader—a sort of battle parade by JESUS CHRIST, the Captain of our salvation, of His troops.

The fire you have to go under is not, as with so many communicants, the strife and temptation of the working world outside. It is the hard battle of pain and weakness and suffering, of bad nights and long days, when it is terribly

hard not to get impatient and irritable, and to murmur and complain at having so much to bear.

Holy Communion will make you stronger against all that. When you receive It, try to feel that He Who suffered so much for you, has come down to touch and help you, just as He touched and helped sick people when He was on earth. Try to feel that, when His own bitter cup of suffering was before Him, He still had time to think about other sufferers; and that He instituted this Holy Communion the very night before He faced His bitter Cross, that He might help others to follow Him better in the path of suffering.

Perhaps the day may not be far off when you will have to face the great change—to pass over the dark river that He passed over before you. But there will be nothing to fear, because He will be with you—Holy Communion will have united you even more closely to Him than before. His hand will support you when you come to the brink of the water. He will be close to you when earth is getting dim, and the familiar faces growing misty. He will see you safely through, and He will be there to welcome you on the other side. He has given you this wonderful pledge of His love, so that you can look forward to it all with perfect confidence.

Have you ever heard that story—still remembered and told in India—about a squadron of cavalry being lost crossing a river in flood?

And why did it happen? Do you suppose the commanding officer would have allowed his men and horses to be swept away, could he have foreseen what was going to occur? No, indeed; but he was only human, and could not know how the ground lay under that rushing water. He could not foresee that the strength of the current would be too much for them to stand against; and that, once swept off their feet and out of the ford, they would be lost. It is different with our heavenly Leader—He has been through the river before; He knows the ground, and the exact force of the current. We shall not lose our footing so long as we keep close to His track; and that is the assurance we have when we hear the words, "Take and eat this in remembrance that CHRIST died for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving."

And the same when we hear, "Drink this in remembrance that CHRIST'S Blood was shed for thee, and be thankful."

And so that heavenly Food *shall* "preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life." Let us, then, take It, looking up to Him in simple faith, and thanking Him for all His love and care.

XII

Holy Communion

II

To-day I am going to speak to you again about Holy Communion, because I hope very soon you may be able to receive It again, and many more times afterwards.

Holy Communion is not like Baptism and Confirmation. In them God pours out His Holy Spirit on His people; first, in infancy; then, when they grow older and enter on the battle of life. It is not necessary to receive Confirmation twice. In Confirmation the Christian soldier takes up his arms, never to lay them down again until the battle of life is over, and he casts them down at the feet of Christ in the rest and peace of Paradise. But in spite of this he needs constant supplies of strength and refreshment from God; just as one meal is not enough to last a man a lifetime, so one Communion is not enough to strengthen our souls. We must go on receiving it regularly, time after time, if we are to keep strong and true in God's service. Do you remember the story of the prophet

Elijah in the Old Testament? His was a strong character—manly, reliable, absolutely fearless. But he had fallen on evil times. God's people had forsaken Him, and they were ruled by a wicked, godless king, who led them farther and farther wrong. Elijah in all the land stood for God and His honour, and boldly proclaimed God's messages, though he knew it meant danger to his life. But one day we read how, pursued by his enemies, and saddened by the sight of so much wickedness and forgetfulness of God all around him, he lost heart altogether, and, casting himself down in the wild desert place where he had fled for refuge, he prayed to God that he might die, and be set free from it all. Then we read how God spoke to him, how He sent His angel, with words of cheer and encouragement, just when Elijah needed it most. And there, away in the wilderness, he suddenly noticed that food and drink had been prepared, and were waiting for him; whilst a voice said, "Arise, and eat, because the journey is too great for thee."

The prophet obeyed the voice; and, in the strength of that wonderful food, was able to journey on many days to a mountain, where God again spoke to him. First, a mighty wind swept by, but God was not in the wind. Then an earthquake made the mountains tremble, but that was not God's voice. After that there was a fire; but, we read again, "God was not in the fire"; and

after the fire there came a still, small voice. GOD had first strengthened His servant by giving him heavenly food; and then He spoke, telling him to take courage, for there were still a faithful few left, and He had work for Elijah to do amongst them. And so the prophet took heart, and went back to it again.

That is what GOD does for us. Not in the noisy, bustling crowd, not in the rush and excitement of life, do we get the strength we want for our journey. It is in the quiet, peaceful moments, when He draws us aside from the world, that we can listen best to the still, small voice, so full of comfort and reassurance, with which He spoke to His servant of old; and still He says the same words, "Rise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee."

The journey has been too great for you sometimes lately—has it not? This long, trying illness has worn you out; you have felt tired and depressed, and wondered how you could go on much longer in the same way. But yet, as GOD came to Elijah in that desert place, and brought him the food he needed so sorely, so He comes to us in the desert of sickness and brings us the very thing we need most—Food for our souls, to keep us brave and strong through our long trial, to give us the peace and confidence that no pain or weariness can ever take away.

GOD knew how hard it was for Elijah, and

He knows how hard it is for you. He knows your needs even better than you know them yourself, and He plans out the very best way of helping you. And by this holy Food He gives us fresh strength, a fresh start on our journey.

And we must always remember He actually comes to us Himself in Holy Communion—He does not send a message, He visits us Himself.

When you are ill what are the things that bring you most comfort and relief?

I think the love and care of those around you, or the visits of the true friend you most care to see. That kindness and sympathy seems to bring you fresh courage. Just as the things they do for your body ease and lighten the pain, so the presence of those you love and understand, and who love and understand you, gives you a certain peace of mind, that helps you to bear the bodily suffering better.

Well, GOD is your best Friend of all. He cares for you more than you know; and His visits to you must be even better than the visits of your best friend. He comes to give you the greatest of all Gifts—Himself; and, by dwelling within you, to give you His goodness and His strength for your own.

I want you to take that thought and dwell on it; to get all the good out of it that GOD wants you to get. Lean up against Him; you are so weak and He is so strong. You need

help so much, and He is so ready to give it. You have so much to suffer, and He is so full of pity and sympathy, and knows so well what you have to bear. Life is so uncertain for you; but He comes to promise you life eternal. You only have to believe His own words, to look up to Him as your Saviour, to receive the great Gift of His Body and Blood; and you have nothing to fear any more; for He has said, "Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

And as you receive Him, think of the great Sacrifice He made for you on the Cross. It cost Him so much to give you this Holy Communion; and that is why we value It so highly. Every time we receive It we commemorate the great Sacrifice of CHRIST on the Cross; the Body broken and the Blood shed for us; and every time we ought to feel more deeply what the love was that could make such a Sacrifice.

And from that carry your mind on; "Lift up your hearts," as the Communion Service says, to the thought that that same JESUS Who died for you, still lives to help you; comes to you; gives Himself to you in this wonderful, mysterious way.

And so, with that wonderful love circling you round, you can face the future without fear; knowing that, united to Him in Holy Communion, nothing can separate you from Him.

"And so we come; O draw us to Thy feet,
Most patient Saviour, Who canst love us still;
And by this Food, so awful and so sweet,
Deliver us from every touch of ill:
In Thine own service make us glad and free,
And grant us never more to part with Thee."

Never more to part with Him—you are His and He is yours: closer than the closest earthly friend. Weak in body, you will yet be strong in Him; suffering often, you will yet have within you the comfort and peace that only the Presence of JESUS can give; for where He is no evil can come.

XIII

The Touch of Faith

S. Mark v. 25–35

We read again and again in the Gospels of the miracles wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was on earth, to heal the sick and raise the dead; but no two are ever quite alike, and each one has its separate lesson to teach us. There is something quite unusual about the story we have just read, for it was performed without the actual knowledge and will of our Lord. Not until the woman was healed of her infirmity that had darkened her life all those years: not until the healing power had come upon her, and health and strength suddenly returned to her body, did she come face to face with the Lord and Master to Whom she owed her recovery.

She was only one of the crowd thronging and pressing around Him, anxious to hear His words, and still more to see the wonderful works He could do. They were in hopes of seeing Him perform one now, and each one was pushing forward to get the best sight. But just as, in a crowd to-day, we should find,

if we could see below the surface, a thousand different hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, and troubles and difficulties; so, on that day there was one in all that crowd who had another motive than curiosity or wonder; in whose heart a new hope had suddenly been born, and who was pressing to its fulfilment with joy and yet with trembling lest she should be disappointed at the last. But she was not disappointed. As soon as the touch of faith made itself felt, different to the touch of all those others in the crowd, the healing virtue went from the Great Healer to the suffering body, and she felt that she was whole.

What a wonderful lesson for us all! God can do nothing for us unless we have faith. Unless we come, as that woman did, believing in His power to save and help us, we cannot get from Him all the good things He is longing to give us. Think of that, you who need so much from Him—patience in your pain and weakness, courage to face the suffering that perhaps awaits you still, relief and healing for your body, if that is God's will for you; you may ask Him for all this; but you must have faith, you must not be like the careless indifferent crowd who would follow Him to-day to see His miracles, and then forget all about Him to-morrow, and so lose the message and meaning of the miracle.

You must come like a child to a father, certain of His love for you, certain of His

power to do everything for the best for your soul and body; and then ready to leave the rest to Him, and trust Him completely. And then He will not fail you, be sure. Although you are a sinner, He has died for you. In Him is the power to save, to heal; your faith does not do the work, but it brings into your life the power of the saving work He has already done. And, even if your body is never made whole in this world, you will have strength to bear your cross bravely; and in the world to come, rest and peace with Him.

But there is another lesson in the story that we must not miss. Notice that our LORD was not content to let the woman go away with her newly restored health and strength, without seeing and speaking with her Healer. He wanted her to *know* Him. She knew *about* Him already, but that was a very different thing. She had heard of His wonderful works, and of the words He spoke to the multitudes, so full of hope and comfort. Even so we can know *about* a person. We can read about them in books or papers, and hear others tell about them. But that is not how we know our friends. It is by talking with them, writing to them, learning from them, being helped, mind and body, by them; getting to understand what their thoughts and purposes are, for ourselves and for others. That is what we mean, when we say we *know* a person: quite another thing to knowing *about* them. And it was into this

sort of knowledge, this closer contact with Himself, that our LORD wished to draw the poor woman, whose simple faith had been the means of bringing her outwardly and bodily near Him. Even then it was the touch of faith. That brought her nearer than any of the careless, bustling crowd; but now He wanted to draw her nearer still. He wanted her to understand more about His love, and to see that He was able to help her in every way, and to heal her soul as well as her body; in fact, that He, to Whom she had come for help, was indeed the SON of GOD, and the Saviour of the world. When she had once looked into His face and seen, as well as the pity and kindness, the majesty and glory of GOD reflected there, she would never forget it again. Her faith, which had been up to now almost what we call superstition—just a belief in the magic power of merely the touch of CHRIST'S Body to heal—was henceforth to be something higher and better altogether; that trust and dependence on Him, that desire to do His will and to rejoice in His presence, that only those experience who really know the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

So let us take away those two thoughts: first, that out of the crowd CHRIST knew the one who came in faith, and who needed help and healing; and secondly, that you, too, must come to Him.

There are so many sufferers in the world; yet He will single you out for His individual

help and pity, and His strength will become yours; strength to go on with, day by day, comfort and hope to cheer you in your sickness, that not even the best earthly friend can give. And more than this, He will lead you on to know Him better. He will speak to you in the quiet lonely watches, and tell you about His great love for you, and how He has allowed this suffering on purpose to draw you nearer to Him, and make you more fit to live with Him one day. And so your religion will be no formal thing, but a reality.

Above all, in your Communions there will be no empty formality, but a coming into the Presence of JESUS; a touching Him; a receiving from Him sufficient for all you need here, and a renewed promise of life eternal with Him when this suffering life is done.

XIV

The True Peace

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—1 *S. John* i. 8, 9.

Peace of mind! an easy mind, free from worry and anxiety, doubts about the future, regrets about the past, perplexity about the present. It is a thing we all would like to have—one of the most valuable and desirable of all possessions.

Pain of body, discomfort, aching limbs, are very bad to bear; but a man who is wretched in mind would, I think, sometimes be ready to change places with the invalid, if he could thereby get rid of the anxious and despairing thoughts that are wearing away his very life.

Usually it is anxiety about this world, about the things that concern our life on earth, and our bodily wants, that seem to cause men and women most trouble and worry. But, as I have often told you, this ought not to be. When you look at the matter fairly and squarely, which really matters the most?—

the body, which must die sooner or later, or the soul, for which GOD has promised you eternal life?

It is on a sick bed that this truth often comes home to a man for the first time in his life. He looks forward, and sees the possibility of health not returning to him again. Possibly an invalid's lot lies in front of him: never to be able to take the same busy, active part in life that he once played; and, if his illness is a critical one, he has perhaps to look for death not so very far ahead—and that is a solemn thought. Brave men who would risk death a hundred times without a thought, in the performance of their duty, or to save a comrade, find it harder to look him in the face on a sick bed, when he comes in such a different dress, as it were, and there is no excitement and rush and hurry to carry us through. But though he is harder to face, yet death is really more merciful when he comes in this way; for then we have time to think, time to look at things as they really are; and to realize the great truths about GOD and our souls, and this world and the next, and the long eternity that is to follow, after death has cut short this little life of ours.

Nevertheless, it is at such a time as this that a man loses for a time his peace of mind. He looks back on his past life; and no one can possibly do that honestly without seeing how many, many things have been wrong in it. It has been said that to lead a good life, we

should try to spend each day as if it were to be our last—that is, to live in such a way as to be always ready for GOD'S call, whenever it may come. I wonder how many days in our lives, when we look back on them, have been spent like that, have been quite the sort of day we should choose to have spent if it were to be our very last on earth?

All the sins, of thought and word and deed, come crowding upon us; and we feel like David did when he wrote in the Psalms—"My wickednesses are gone over my head, and are like a sore burden too heavy for me to bear."

That is how we feel when we realize our sinfulness, but we do not always realize it. Human hearts get very hard and cold about sin sometimes. I think there are two thoughts that should help us to repentance, to show us how sinful we are and to make us sorry for our sins.

And the first thought is—the great love of GOD for us. The Bible is just one long story of the love of GOD: how He set His affection on man, and tried to make him good and happy; how He tried to show him time after time in what true happiness consisted; how He persevered when men would not have His love; and how, finally, He "so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten SON" to die for us, because that was the only way we could be saved.

And then think of His love for yourself, as shown in your individual life. How good He

has been to you! How many good things He has sent you, even though perhaps you never took the trouble to ask Him for them! How much sympathy and kindness you have found even now in your illness!

He has followed you, and taught you day by day, even when you turned your back on Him, longing to bring you to believe in and understand His love; and now, most likely, He has brought this sickness upon you on purpose to make you think about Him, and so help you to know Him better.

The more we think about GOD's great love, greater than the strongest earthly love, of which even the mother's love for her child, pure and strong and unselfish, gives us only a faint idea; the more I think we shall realize how far we have fallen short of what we ought to have been, and how often and often we have slighted and put aside that love.

And secondly, the thought of what it cost to save us from our sins ought to make us feel the greatness of them. The SON of GOD had to be crucified; to die a shameful and suffering death; to be mocked at and jeered at and scorned: to feel even that GOD had forsaken Him. All that suffering and that death were necessary, borne by the SON of GOD—nothing else could pay the price. It was the weight of your sins, and mine, and those of our fellow men and women, that nailed Him to the Cross—*that* surely must bring home to us that we are sinners.

We began this reading by talking about peace of mind, and what a valuable thing it is; and perhaps you are thinking now that thoughts about our sinfulness, and our wasted opportunities, and our unfitness for heaven, are not such as to make us feel happy or at ease. Ah! but that is just the point. There are many people who say that they don't see that they have much to repent of; that there are a good many people worse than themselves; and that they don't think GOD will be hard on them. These people may have a certain sort of peace of mind and contentment; but it is a kind that is not worth having.

They are deceiving themselves—"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

No; the true peace of mind comes through confessing our sins to GOD; in coming to Him as a child comes to its father, bringing Him first our sorrow for the past, and begging His forgiveness; and then our good resolutions for the future, and asking His constant help to keep them. And then the forgiveness will be all ready for us; for GOD loves to forgive, and is waiting to pardon and receive His penitent children. It has been said that there is no greater happiness than the happiness of being forgiven. If we *have* realized our sins, if (as they were to David) they have been to us a

sore burden that was crushing us down—then, and then only, we shall feel the relief of having that burden removed; of knowing that, through JESUS CHRIST and His death on the Cross, our sins are as though they never had been, and GOD has taken away the load for ever. Surely that is truer, better, nearer the mark, than to go on contented with ourselves: never caring how much we have offended GOD; and taking it just as a matter of course that everything will come right in the end.

When our LORD was healing the paralysed man, He said, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."

He did not say, "Be of good cheer, because I have made you well and taken away your paralysis." No! He had given him the greater gift of forgiveness; and that was a thing to cheer him even more than the healing of his body.

And so He says to us, "Be of good cheer. Even if your body does not get well in this world, I have a greater gift still for you—forgiveness of all your sins; peace of mind, which comes only to those who have repented, and been forgiven; and, at last, eternal life, and health for soul and body, which shall last for ever and ever.

XV

Looking Upward

Numbers xxi. 4–9

This story comes from the Old Testament, from that wonderful account of the journeyings of the children of Israel through the wilderness. God had set His people free from their enemies, and had promised to lead them to a country where they would be free and happy; and where, if they would serve and obey Him, they would dwell in safety, and grow into a powerful and prosperous nation. But first they had to go through a great many trials and difficulties, and were to wander for years in a strange and desert country. Even here, however, they were not without God's guidance and protection. Through their leader Moses, God often spoke to them, and told them what to do; rebuked or encouraged them according as they needed it; and we read how He went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

Even so it is with us. Our story is the story of that ancient nation over again—God has at our Baptism sealed us for His own, and set us free from our enemy Satan; He has promised

us a home in heaven; and we are journeying to it, led and guided by His HOLY SPIRIT, Who came to us in our Baptism and again at our Confirmation; and, through the trials and difficulties and troubles of this life, He is fitting us to be with Him and serve Him for ever and ever. The story I have just read to you refers to a time when the children of Israel had, as was often the case, sinned against GOD; and He had punished them by sending fiery serpents amongst them, whose bite was terribly poisonous, and many of the people had died or were dying of their effects.

But GOD, as always, was merciful. He saw their distress, and He always comes more than half-way to meet the penitent sinner. He bade Moses make a serpent of brass, and mount it high on a pole, so that every one could see it—a dazzling object in the bright Eastern sun. The people were to look upward at it, and show in this way, that GOD had appointed, their repentance for what was past and their faith in GOD'S power and willingness to help them; and, as they looked, they were healed. The brazen serpent was nothing in itself. GOD did not mean them to worship that! But, it was put there as a sort of standard, something that every one could see, to raise their thoughts to the only One Who could help them.

Long afterwards, when JESUS CHRIST came to earth, He reminded His hearers of the scene I have just described; and told them

that, as the brazen serpent had been lifted up, that all might look upon it and live, even so must He, the Son of God, be lifted up on the Cross, that so He might draw all men unto Him; that you and I and the whole world might look up to Him and be saved.

The brazen serpent in the wilderness had been a type or picture of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. Only in Him is salvation. The Israelites who were obstinate and faithless and who refused to look up to the brazen serpent, died; and those who refuse to look up to the Cross to-day must also die, for their souls cannot be saved except in Him.

So I want you to-day to think about looking upward. It is so easy to look downward. Here on earth, in this sick room, there is much to weigh down your spirits and chain your thoughts to the things that concern your bodily life. Your body is causing you a great deal of trouble and pain just now; you are weak and ill, and all sorts of little things that you would not trouble about, if you could get out and about as you used to do, weigh upon you, and you cannot forget them. The hours drag slowly in an illness, especially when you cannot sleep; and everything tends to depress you and make you low-spirited and miserable. Well, I believe a great help in all this is looking upward. If we think more of God, we shall certainly think less of ourselves; if we think more about heaven, we shall think less about earth. If we look up to the Cross, where

JESUS CHRIST hung and suffered for us, we shall find our own pain a little easier to bear. If we remember why He was lifted up on the Cross, to draw all men unto Him, we shall feel that He is our Companion in suffering: and also that He has won us the peace and rest that are to come when suffering is over. This is why so many sick people find it a help to have a cross, or a picture of JESUS on His Cross, hung in their room; they can look up to it often, and be reminded of all this.

Ever since our LORD JESUS CHRIST died on the Cross for us the Cross has been to Christians what the colours are to a regiment. In old days each regiment carried their standards into battle. They were a beacon to the whole battalion, something to remind them of the cause they were fighting for, and the honour of the regiment; something to follow through shot and shell, and, if need were, to die for. And though they no longer go into battle, they are still regarded as a dear and honoured possession, and their tattered remains hang in many a church in our country. Depend upon it, it was looking up at those colours that made many a sinking heart brave again, and steeled many a wavering arm to fresh effort in the day of battle.

The mountaineer, as he climbs towards the summit, loves to keep his eye upon the mountain top—the goal of his climb; and the weary traveller, as he tramps along, finds the way shorter if he keeps his eye on sky and trees,

instead of fixing them only on the dull roadway.

Some people seem to go through life looking downward; they have no eyes except for this world and its troubles and worries. Others have their eye, as it were, on the heavenly country in the distance, and on Him Who is their Guide to that country. And for these the way is twice as easy, and they mind the business of this life just as well, and are even more useful people on earth because their eyes are trained to looking upward.

> "O happy band of pilgrims,
> Look upward to the skies."

Yes, look upward, even in this hard bit of your pilgrimage that you are going through now. JESUS CHRIST has trodden that very path of suffering; and, if you look to Him, He will draw you ever upward and onward, where He is gone. It is an uphill road, we know, and there is no use in denying it. But that is all the more reason for keeping our eyes upward. We must fight against the thoughts that would weigh us down; we must look up to the Cross, and beyond the Cross to the Crown.

XVI

The Transfiguration

S. Mark ix. 2–27

This is one of the scenes in our Lord's life on earth when we get a glimpse of His Divinity; by which I mean that we see, and feel absolutely sure, that He was God as well as Man.

There were other times when God gave signs and proofs that this was the case. We remember how, on that long ago winter night —the first Christmas—when He was born a little Baby of poor parents, the angels in heaven sang the Christmas song of praise and thanksgiving. And the shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks in the fields, heard the message, and knew that the Son of God had come to earth to save men; and they sought out the lonely place where the Saviour lay that they might worship Him.

Again, when He came to S. John the Baptist to be baptized, in order to set an example to us all that through Baptism we must enter His Church and become members of Him, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, to show those who stood by that this was indeed the Son of God; and the voice

of GOD was heard saying, "This is My beloved SON, in Whom I am well pleased."

And again at His Crucifixion GOD showed signs and wonders—darkness in the middle of the day, a storm that rent the curtain of the Jewish Temple in two, and other surprising sights and sounds told men that He Who hung upon the Cross was no ordinary condemned prisoner, but Him Who was suffering for the sins of the whole world, the LORD of earth and sea and sky; Who might, had He chosen, have destroyed all with a word, instead of patiently enduring the sufferings imposed on Him by sinful men.

And so, in the Transfiguration, our LORD took three of His Apostles aside from the world; and, up on a high and lonely mountain, He was transfigured—changed before their eyes. They were allowed to see Him, not in the garb of a poor man, but bright and glorious; the same JESUS they knew, yet without doubt the SON of GOD—all-powerful, dazzling in brightness, the LORD of all people and all things in heaven and earth. It was a wonderful scene, and the disciples never forgot it. How often it must have come back to their minds in after years! When they were in trouble or difficulty, when they were tempted to despair, and to doubt GOD's power and goodness, that scene on the mountain-top, so solemn, so peaceful, must have seemed present once more to their eyes; and they must have taken fresh courage in the thought that JESUS CHRIST,

their Friend and Master, the poor, the despised, the Crucified, in His life on earth, was actually GOD as well; that He had taken the trouble to show them His glory, so that there might be no doubt about it. And that thought would give them fresh hope, since they would feel His cause was bound to triumph in the end; that GOD is stronger than Satan, and good than evil, and so their work in the Name of their Master was not in vain. Whilst the disciples, half afraid, watched their LORD thus changed—transfigured—before them, there appeared two other forms: those of Moses, the great leader of the Israelites, chosen by GOD to deliver His people from captivity, and to give them the Law, which was to guide them and keep them true to His service; and Elijah, the faithful prophet of GOD, who, in a time when GOD's people had gone far astray, and hardly any were left who really loved and worshipped Him, stood firm for what was right, and spoke out boldly, at the risk of his life, about GOD and His laws, and the danger of forsaking Him, since none else could save and help them. These two great men had long been dead; but JESUS CHRIST is the LORD of life and death, and there is no death in reality for His true servants. Moses and Elias had both been tried and trusted servants of GOD. They had stood between Him and His people, as it were, fearlessly giving His messages and proclaiming His will. That was

in the days when the Jews were GOD's chosen people and His messages came only to them. Now JESUS CHRIST had come to earth, to save not only the Jews but all men; and to found His great Church all over the world, the great family and home, in which every believer was to have his place and part.

What greater joy for Moses and Elias, called back to earth, where the SON of GOD was living and working among men, than to hear this wonderful news from His own lips! For we read that they talked together; and their talk was of His approaching death—the great Sacrifice for the sins of the world, that was to bring about the salvation of men. They were looking forward to it; we look back to it; and truly, it is the central point in the world's history—the great event beside which all other events seem small and unimportant. It began a new life for men; it gave them a place that they had never held before—a place of honour and dignity, as sons of GOD and inheritors of eternal life; a place in His kingdom on earth, the Church; a place in His kingdom in heaven hereafter.

Moses and Elijah, in their life on earth, had looked onward to this wonderful fulfilment of GOD's promises; now it was actually coming to pass.

As Peter and James and John saw this wonderful sight, and listened to that memorable conversation, they felt that they were on holy ground; that in such company, amid

such surroundings, it would be happiness to live—temptation, sorrow, trouble, seemed so far away: and all that was good and pure and holy so near and real. And so Peter, who was always the leader and the first to speak, broke out into the expression of his feelings—"LORD, it is good for us to be here"; and then he went on to suggest that they should make three tabernacles, resting-places on the mountain; that so the holy vision might continue, and they might never have to depart from what was so helpful and uplifting to their religious life. Perhaps you have felt like that sometimes, after singing some beautiful hymn, or a helpful encouraging talk with a friend; your religion has seemed everything to you, and you have wished that such feelings could last for ever.

But our LORD did not encourage Peter in this suggestion. The vision passed away; Moses and Elias vanished; the glory and the shining raiment in which JESUS, as GOD, had been clothed, vanished too; and He stood with His disciples alone once more. Then JESUS prepared to leave the Transfiguration mountain, and to return once more to the work that was waiting for Him below. The mountain solitude, the holy conversation, the glory and the majesty, were all His; but so was the struggling, suffering world below, and His work in it was not yet done. And that brings us to the very part of the story that has the special message to you.

For, down at the foot of the mountain, a very different scene had meantime been going on. Some of the disciples were waiting for their LORD there; and to them had been brought by an anxious father, a poor epileptic boy, whom doctors had tried in vain to cure. We know what a terrible thing epilepsy is, and how it makes people not only helpless, but violent and almost insane. This seems to have been a very bad case of it; the poor child was a burden to himself and all those who had to do with him; and his father, hearing of the new Teacher, and the wonderful miracles that He wrought, brought him to the disciples, who had been given power by their Master to work miracles and heal the sick as well; but they could not cure Him. Either they had not enough faith, or the father had not enough faith in them. When JESUS came down from the mountain the crowd was still assembled at the foot, and the boy was even then seized with another terrible fit. What a contrast to the scene He had just left!—up there all had been quiet and restful, here all was turmoil and anxiety. The boy, like a mad creature, foaming and struggling, the parents disappointed and despairing; the crowd restless and eager to see what would happen next. And into it all came JESUS, fresh from the glory of the Transfiguration, the strength and the beauty of the mountain-top—JESUS, with His reassuring word—"Bring him unto Me": and His healing touch, that sent the evil spirit

out of the boy in an instant, and restored him whole to his wondering and grateful parents. Even so He comes to us still. Though He is GOD, the GOD of Moses and Elijah, and of all the past ages and the coming eternal years, He is still our pitying, comforting, healing Saviour—always near, always ready to come down from the mountain into the troubled world below, to touch and to heal, to sympathize and to help. There are not two GODS—One Who lives in heaven and One on earth. The same GOD Who created and rules the universe is the pitying, loving FATHER, Who cares for each one of His children's individual troubles, and without Whose knowledge not a sparrow falls to the ground. "Are ye not of more value than many sparrows?" said our LORD. Yes, indeed; just as He cared for the sorrow of those broken-hearted parents, and the suffering of the poor, struggling boy, so He cares infinitely for you. And just because He is the pure, Holy GOD, spotless and glorious, so that the disciples had to hide their eyes before such dazzling whiteness, He is the more able to understand all about your suffering, and the more able to give you just exactly the comfort and the healing that you need. His ministers on earth can help you, just as the disciples of JESUS helped the sick; but only from Him can come the true healing, the power that can set you free from sin; the comfort and the strength that can bear you through the worst of pain and weakness and

weariness, and make you able to endure all in patience for His sake.

Then look up to Him as He comes down to you from the mountain-side, and say, as the father said of old, "LORD, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief"; and He will help it. He will make your faith in Him, your love for Him grow stronger day by day; and at last you will feel, like Peter did upon the mountain, that it is good for you, above all things, to be near to JESUS, even though the nearness may mean a heavy cross to bear, a very sharing of your Master's Cross, which shall lead on hereafter to a sharing of His Crown.

XVII

The House on a Rock

"Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."—*S. Luke* vi. 47–49.

Founded upon a rock. This is by no means the only place in which we hear of a rock in the Bible. Again and again the rock is mentioned as a picture of strength, of sureness, of a solid foundation that cannot be swept away.

"O set me up upon the Rock that is higher than I."

Thus spoke David, when he felt as if the storms of his life's troubles were sweeping him away. And again, when he is thanking God for help in trouble, he says, "Thou hast set my feet upon the rock and ordered my goings." Something to cling to, something to depend on, something that the waves and storms of life cannot disturb or shift from its place—

that is the idea the word rock is meant to convey; and thus we connect it with that thought. "The LORD is my Stony Rock and my Defence." It was the feeling of certainty, of trust in a stronger, more settled power than their own, that made these men of old speak of GOD as a Rock; that makes us still feel the truth and meaning of that fine old hymn, "Rock of Ages."

Those of us who have seen a rocky sea-coast, or have lived in wild, mountainous countries, can understand these words the best; for they know what a great solid thing a rock is, and how hard for human hands to move. We know how they stand, year after year, whilst the waves of the sea dash against them, facing and weathering the worst of storms; that is why human beings seek their shelter for protection. We see the little villages nestling around our coasts under the shelter of the great cliffs; and, on the coasts of the Mediterranean, one notices the villages built high up on rocky eminences, so that one can hardly tell which is the natural rock, and which the building wrought by human hands. They were placed there in the days when fierce wild bands of pirates and marauders used to sweep down suddenly in their ships upon the coasts; and the safer and stronger the place chosen to dwell in, the more likely was escape from their hands. You have heard of the stronghold of Gibraltar—perhaps you have even lived upon it for a time; and probably you know that it

guards the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea, the high road to the East. We call it "the Rock"; and there it stands, the pride of England and the envy of other powers, a fine example of rocky strength and steadfast defence.

Now that is what we want our religion to be —not a light, careless thing, tossed about and shifted by the winds and storms of life; but something steadfast, solid, immovable; a thing not to be affected by the changes and chances, the troubles and doubts and anxieties and difficulties, that are bound to come sooner or later into all our lives. I have heard of what is called a "fine-weather religion"; that, when hard times come along, seems to evaporate and go into nothing, leaving a person with nothing to hold on to, and not quite sure whether there is a GOD or not, as everything is allowed to be so dark and lowering. That sort of religion is no good to anybody. It is like the house on the sand—it has no solid foundations. Perhaps all of us know what it is, in times of trouble and difficulty, to feel as if the ground were giving way under our feet; as if all we loved best and cared for most was slipping away from us, and there was nothing much left to live for. Perhaps it was the loss of some one we loved; perhaps it was poverty; perhaps it was the loss of health and strength, and the power to be busy and active, and earn our own living. You are going through that last experience now. It is one of the most

trying of all the storms of life, and one of the severest tests of a man's faith. Then is the time to see whether he has built the house of his life on the "Rock of Ages"—the Rock that never changes, that nothing can shift. "All Thy waves and storms are gone over me," writes the Psalmist, in a time of great trouble. Have you ever felt like that—as if the waves were too strong for you, the pain and weakness too much to bear? And then at a time like that to feel the rock beneath one's feet again, to know that GOD is with us just the same, however dark it may be!—that is the best of all helps.

You see, religion is not a matter of feeling. Sometimes it all seems very dark—we cannot feel much comfort even in the thought of GOD; but He is there just the same. He will not fail us. We have only to go on believing; to look up to Him through the dark, and say, "GOD help me, I believe; help Thou my unbelief. Be near me now in the darkness, the same as in the light." And so He will. You will feel the Rock under your feet again—you will know that this world's troubles may do their worst; for nothing can separate you from the love of GOD. Yes, and when you have to cross the dark river at last He will still be near you. The Rock will be there to hold on to, the firm ground under your feet that you have stood upon in life, and built your hopes on for here and for hereafter. Then let us build our houses on the Rock, not

on the shifting sand. Sands are very bright and attractive on a bright day, stretching out golden and smooth in the sunlight, and with the little rippling waves breaking gently on them. But look a little closer, and see how even those little rippling waves wash them about at their will; and, when the storm comes, you will find it has changed the whole face of the beach; anything built upon it would have stood but a sorry chance. It is just so with our worldly hopes and ambitions. So many of us care only for this world—its comforts, its pleasures, its money-getting; and then come sickness and poverty, and sweep them all away. And what is there left to stand upon or hope for? Nothing but disappointment, hollowness, worry and anxiety for this life, and for what is to happen to us here; whilst the future is a blank, all uncertainty and dread.

Let us build our house on the Rock, then, while we may! Religion, if it is to be anything to us, must be everything. God must be our Guide, our Counsellor, our Friend, our daily Companion, in the bright days and the dark days as well. Then when the floods arise, of whatever kind they may be, we shall be safe.

In the last Indian frontier war, the rear-guard of a regiment was cut off by the enemy, and left behind. Next day, when search was made for them, their bodies were found close to a great rock, where they had evidently taken refuge and defended themselves to the last;

each man dying hard, as Englishmen are wont to die, with his back to the rock and his face to the enemy.

Even so, close to the Rock, must we Christian soldiers fight our good fight to the last, but in that fight there will be no defeat; for GOD is on our side, and He is stronger than any trouble, any temptation that may come.

"Firm on the Rock of Ages"—that is the only safe refuge from the storm, whether it be the storm of trouble, or of sickness, or of death.

XVIII

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST

JESUS said to His disciples: "Now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient . . . that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. . . . I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: . . . and He will shew you things to come."—*S. John* xvi. 5–7, 12, 13.

THUS our LORD JESUS CHRIST spoke to His disciples, His friends and followers, when the time was drawing near for Him to leave earth and go up into heaven again. Partings with those we love are always sad, even when our friends are going to a better or happier place. "Good-bye" is still a hard word; and the disciples were saying "Good-bye" to the best of friends—JESUS CHRIST Himself. No wonder they felt it; no wonder "sorrow filled their hearts."

Our LORD always knows directly when His friends are in trouble. You know how it is with an earthly friend, when we are in trouble or in pain; even though we do not say so, the friend sees it for himself, because he loves and

watches us; so JESUS CHRIST, with His tender sympathy, can read our hearts.

And He chose that time of sorrow and depression to give to His friends, in the words I have just been reading to you, one of the most wonderful of all His promises of help—when He went away they were not to be left desolate. No; He even told them it was "expedient"—good for them—that He should go away, for He was going to send Someone Who could fill the vacant place even better; and that Someone was the Third Person of the Holy Trinity—GOD the HOLY SPIRIT.

Whilst our LORD was on earth, although He was still the SON of GOD, He was, as I have often told you, a real Man. And, as a real Man, He could of course only be in one place at a time. Only a few people could be near Him, hear Him speak, see Him work miracles, and learn by actual sight and hearing all about His love and power. He had work for His friends to do in many different parts of the world, and He could not go with them and be with them all at once.

But the HOLY SPIRIT *could* do this. Unseen, yet full of might and power to help, He can dwell in the hearts of men; He can be everywhere at the same time—with you and with me as well, though we may be miles and miles apart.

Listen to some of our LORD's words about Him.

"I will pray the FATHER, and He shall give you another Comforter, . . . even the Spirit of truth. . . . He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

What a cheering, helpful promise for those men, just when they were feeling lonely and miserable, because their Master was going away to leave them!

That the HOLY SPIRIT, Who is GOD as well as He, was to come and fill the blank, bringing comfort and joy; that He could be with them all, and with them for ever, supplying all their need.

The Comforter! How a sick man longs for comfort, comfort for the poor tired body, so full of pain and weakness and discomfort! And the body acts so quickly on the mind; bodily weakness and pain bring low spirits and depression, and sometimes almost despair. Comfort for mind and body are what he needs; and even if friends cannot give it entirely, the little things they do, the little comforts they bring, the little acts of thoughtfulness, the small things that help to ease pain or brighten the sick room—what a difference they make! This thought gives you some idea of what the work of the HOLY SPIRIT is in the world. In fact all these things do really come from GOD, for all comfort is sent by Him.

"I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you." So spake JESUS CHRIST.

He and the FATHER and the HOLY SPIRIT are all One, you see; so when He promised the

Comforter should come, it was really like coming back to them Himself. How sad to think how many people in this world are without the comfort of the HOLY SPIRIT, because they never listen for His voice in their hearts: they never pray to GOD to send Him to them; they never try to follow His guidance. It is like saying "No" to a good friend who wants to be kind to us; like telling him we don't want his friendship. And now see what He will do for us if we will only let Him.

First, He will comfort us. He will bring into our hearts that peace and trust that nothing—not even pain and sickness—can take away; that is to the mind what comforting, healing things are to the body. He will whisper to us in the darkest moments that GOD still loves us just the same; that He wants us to be brave and patient; and that everything will end right if we will only be true to Him. And so He will gradually make us see that nothing really matters in this life except keeping close to GOD; and that, so long as we do that, nothing can possibly harm us. Secondly, He will guide us. We all want a guide. The traveller on the lonely road, when night is coming on, looks eagerly for the hand-post, and scans it to see which road he is to take. And life is often enough like a lonely road on a dark night—is it not? Has it ever been so with you? Have you ever felt lost, perplexed, anxious, and troubled, wondering how to go on? Every door perhaps seemed

shut to you, every way barred by difficulty of some sort. At such times did you ask GOD to guide you?

His HOLY SPIRIT was there at hand, ready to show you if you had looked to Him. Perhaps GOD has brought this sickness to you on purpose to teach you to look more to Him as your Guide; to show you that, however fond we may be of choosing our own road, we cannot guide ourselves, and that His guidance is best.

We ought never to take a step in life, never make a decision, without praying first for the guidance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, without asking Him to show us which way is the one we ought to take. If you have a good friend on earth, who always tries to help and advise you for the best, you make a rule of consulting that friend before you do anything decisive. And GOD is our best Friend, so we certainly ought to consult Him. "He will guide you into all truth"—that is His promise." We all want the truth. If we know the truth we cannot go far wrong. And GOD *is* the Truth—so we cannot be deceived and disappointed in Him, like we may be in others. He will not be friendly one day and distant the next, faithful to-day and faithless to-morrow. He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," and His promise never fails; so let us take the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD for our Guide.

Thirdly, He will strengthen us. How much we all want strength! It is only as we learn

to trust GOD more, and see how strong He is, that we fully realize our own weakness.

You needed GOD's strength when you were out in the battle of life—amongst all its excitements and temptations and changes and chances. But I doubt if you quite knew your need then, if you thought of it and asked for GOD's strength as much as you should have done. But now that He has called you aside from the world, and given you bodily weakness and suffering to bear, you realize it more. Now that you could not do even half-a-day's work, nor walk any distance without being tired, you are yet perhaps stronger in the strength of the HOLY SPIRIT than you were in your busy, active days; for I hope, by prayer and faith in GOD, that wonderful strength has come to you; and that, in spite of the bodily weakness, you can feel the loving strong arms of GOD holding you fast. And, even when you are in pain, and suffering great weakness and discomfort, you can still whisper, "Nearer, my GOD to Thee, nearer to Thee," and His strength will be there to sustain and uphold you.

There is a true story of a lad, who, because he refused to use bad language with his mates, was forced by them to stand close to the smelting furnace till he was scorched and burnt by the heat. Yet he stood firm, and when asked by some one afterwards how he had felt through that terrible time, he said, "I felt GOD nearer to me than ever before."

And GOD *will* uphold His faithful soldiers

through suffering and temptation and death by the mighty power of His HOLY SPIRIT. So let us ever ask Him for that power to comfort and guide and strengthen us. In the words of the Confirmation prayer—

"Defend, O LORD, this Thy servant with Thy heavenly grace, that he may continue Thine for ever, and daily increase in Thy HOLY SPIRIT more and more, until he come to Thine everlasting kingdom. Amen."

XIX

Made Clean

"Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. . . . I will; be thou clean."—*S. Mark* i. 40, 41.

The request was made by a poor leper, who came to our Lord for healing. The answer, so kind and so ready, was spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Leprosy is a thing we seldom hear much about now, at any rate not in this country. But it was very common in the time of our Lord, and in the country where He lived. Very strict rules were made about the separation of these unfortunate people from their fellow creatures. Leprosy was, and still is, terribly catching; and, as there were no hospitals in those days where they could be treated and looked after, they were simply turned out of the cities, and had to spend their lives in wildernesses and waste places, living as best they could, and crying out to all they met, "Unclean! Unclean!" so as to warn them to keep at a distance. People did not need a second warning; they shunned the haunts of the poor creatures, and they

became the outcasts of society. Even now, as we know, when they are cared for and provided for, they have to be severely isolated in what are called leper colonies; and perhaps you have heard the name of that hero of modern times, Father Damien, a Roman Catholic priest, who gave up everything to go and live amongst them, and help them, soul and body; till at last he, too, became a victim to the fatal disease, and gave his life, after the example of his Master, for his fellow creatures.

Our LORD, so we read in the Bible, never turned His back on the lepers who came with their sad story, and begged of Him the great gift of healing. Now, we have thought many times of the miracles of healing performed by our LORD, and have dwelt on the mercy and kindness that loved to relieve the bodily pain of those who came to Him in faith. So to-day I want you to think of leprosy, of which we so often hear in the Bible, as a type or picture of sin; and of the healing of soul, the cleansing from sin, that our LORD also came to perform. For, as I have said before, our souls matter more than our bodies. Their health is of the greatest importance; because the body, even if it is healed here, must eventually die; whilst the soul is destined to live for ever, and nothing can kill it. Now, if we think about leprosy, we can understand why it is like sin, and why it was chosen to teach

us lessons about sin. Sin clings about us just as leprosy clings around its victims. It seems as if we cannot get away from it. It becomes a part of ourselves. Whatever the sin is, it is the same. Temper, jealousy, untruthfulness, impatience, selfishness; they are all equally difficult to overcome. They keep cropping up at every turn; they get ingrained into our natures. It is just as impossible for us to get rid of them, without GOD'S help, as it was for that leper to get rid of his leprosy, without the healing touch of JESUS CHRIST.

Just as impossible without GOD'S help! Yes, but with GOD all things are possible; and He is able to cleanse from sin, just as JESUS was able to heal the sick. He is able, as the hymn says, to "cleanse us from its guilt and power." That means that He can forgive us and wash us clean of the sins we have already committed; and also that He can help us to overcome them in the future. Just as a dirty soiled garment can be washed clean and spotless; so, if we go to Him in faith, really believing, as the leper did, GOD can wash away all those sins of which we have been guilty in the past. We could not count them if we tried. Not a day has passed but what, in thought, or word or deed, we have sinned. The stains would be so thick and close together if we could see them, that we could hardly make out one from the other. And yet what does GOD say? "Though

your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." And how? Not through any merit of our own. We must be quite sure about that from the first. Just because our LORD JESUS CHRIST died for us on the Cross; just because He gave His Life on purpose to cleanse us from our sins. We have only to go to Him and say, "LORD, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," and His answer is the same as of old, "I will; be thou clean." What a wonderful thought! All the stains gone, washed out as if they had never been there at all. Nothing to weigh on our minds, nothing to come between us and GOD and make us feel unfit to come near to Him in prayer, or in Holy Communion; or indeed to appear before Him when we come to die.

And as He can wash away the guilt, so He can save us from the power of sin. As we get to love Him more, as we get to depend more on Him and be always looking up to Him for help, we shall gain strength to resist the temptations when they come upon us, to stand firm in His strength, and gradually to overcome. *Your* temptations are different now to what they used to be when you were well and strong. From some of them GOD has delivered you, by withdrawing you from the world and placing you in the quiet of a sick room. But the devil can follow us even there; and he tempts us to impatience,

irritability, discontent, or other sins of the kind; sins that weakness, and discomfort, and pain make it so easy to give way to, and so hard to withstand. But GOD is stronger than the devil, and He can help you even here. Just as He set the poor leper free, so He can free you from the assaults of the devil, and the power of sin. He will be near to whisper peace and hope and courage when the temptation comes, and when you feel, in your weakness and pain, that it must be too strong for you. He will check the hasty word, and stay the impatient movement, and change the angry tone to one of patience and gentleness. He will make your spirit strong and brave; so that the poor, weak, suffering body cannot drag it down, and hinder it from communion with GOD. And as you grow to trust Him more entirely, the temptations will grow less, and the devil will see it is no use to attack a stronghold guarded by GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT; and that stronghold will be your soul.

Then, if GOD spares you to regain your health, to go out into the world again, you will go forth strong in Him. He will, and He can, make you clean; and this illness may be the means He has chosen to make you think about your past sins, and help you to lead a holier life, and give yourself more entirely to His service.

"LORD, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. . . . I will; be thou clean."

You, who know what disease and suffering are, can realize what that poor man's prayer meant, and what joy the kind answer must have brought him.

And I want you to feel the same joy in the thought that GOD can heal your soul, can take away your sin, as you would if He had healed your body.

Take this message home to yourself. Think of the weight of sin that has been piling up in all your past life, and how it would unfit you for heaven and its happiness and peace. And then think of JESUS taking it all away. Tell yourself over and over again that He died to save you from your sins, that He lives to help you; and then you will feel that nothing that happens to your body can really matter much, because He has healed your soul, and made it fit to live for ever with Him.

XX

Parable of "The Talents"

S. Matthew xxv. 14–30

When we use the word "talent" now in ordinary conversation, we usually mean some sort of greatness or cleverness in a man. When we talk about a talented person, we mean a person who has been endued with great natural gifts; and who rises above his fellow-men in the world by means of his greater powers, whether as a writer, an artist, a musician, a general, or whatever it may be.

When our Lord told the parable of the talents, the word meant in the story a sum of money, as used by the Jews of that time, to whom He was speaking. But a parable is, you know, an earthly story with a hidden meaning; and the important part for us to find out *is* that hidden meaning, and what it was intended to teach, not only those who heard it then, but you and me, and how it is to help us in our daily lives.

And I think we soon find that the story refers not only to what we call talented people, but to all God's servants. You see the king gave differently to his different

servants—to one five talents, to another two, and to another one. And he evidently did not do this because he liked one better than another. GOD is a wise Master. He makes no favourites. He is a kind FATHER, but a just one. He does not spoil one child and neglect another, like we see some earthly parents do. But He knows what each one is capable of. He knows our different characters and dispositions, and He gives us each our work accordingly. So that when, in the story, the king gave differently to his different servants, it means that GOD gives us all certain opportunities of serving Him. None of us are so small or poor or humble but what He has work for us to do; and while He calls some to rule nations, and lead armies, and make great discoveries, He bids others serve Him quietly in quiet places. And yet in His eyes their work is just as important in its way. In a great campaign you know how vast the plans of the commander-in-chief must be. He divides his army into brigades; he chooses a man with a steady, careful head, and a cautious judgement for that position; and a dashing cavalry leader, remarkable for his swift daring movements, to play a part where those qualities are most needed. Again, whilst the leaders each have their posts assigned, they could do nothing without subordinate officers, nor the non-commissioned officers, each with their orders to take and to give, and their

responsibilities to fulfil; nor yet without the private soldier, who makes up the rank and file of the army, and, by his strict obedience and steady adherence to duty, makes it possible for great plans to be achieved and great victories won.

And so it is with GOD'S great plan. Not one of His servants can say, "I have no power; no opportunities. My life is so obscure, my lot so humble, that it cannot much matter what use I make of it; no one will be much the better or the worse for how I behave, and GOD surely will hardly expect anything of one to whom He has given so little influence in the world."

The parable of the talents was told on purpose to warn us, who think our opportunities are small, against wasting them. That was just what the slothful servant did, and we have read how he was blamed for it by his master.

GOD gives to some of us only one talent, so to speak. We are not called upon to be leaders amongst men, but we are yet given our post to fill; and when our LORD and Master returns to reckon with us, as He will do, we know, one day, He will expect us to have filled it faithfully. The post He has called you to now—what is it? Not to do, but to suffer. To be weak and helpless, when you would like to be strong and active; to live a life of idleness, when you would like to be busy and hard at work. More than

this—to suffer great pain and discomfort; to be tired out, yet unable to sleep; and so weary of it all, that you could cry for sheer weakness and low spirits.

And yet, though it seems so strange, all this goes to make up the talent GOD has given you to use for Him; for it is the opportunity He has given you to serve Him, by patience and courage; or to fail in serving Him, by discontent, and murmuring, and bitterness with the world in general, and your own lot in particular. It is not an easy post He has given you to fill. Those who think it is easy are vastly mistaken, and no one knows that better than you do. And just because it is a difficult post to fill faithfully, it is the more honourable, and I think GOD has given you a talent out of which a great deal may be made. For there is nothing more dear in GOD'S sight than patient bearing of the Cross; nor is there anything more helpful to others than to see it. The busy active workers in the world often learn more about GOD'S love in a sick room, than from all their reading of books, or from any experience in the bustling world outside. GOD'S power must indeed be great, they think, if such a cross can be borne cheerfully, through the faith and trust that sufferer has in Him. And so they leave the sick man's side feeling that indeed the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD is there, supporting and upholding that brave patient life through days of pain and nights of sleeplessness; and

they have a deeper sense of His nearness and His power to help them than ever before, and go forth in His strength to influence and help others again in their turn.

When you throw a tiny pebble into the water, you know how the circles rise round it, getting wider and wider until at last they stir the water to the very banks. Just so do we influence others by our lives. Ours seems such a little circle; but we never know how far its influence spreads, nor how many other lives the spreading circles touch.

And we never shall know until at last all things are made clear in God's light. Then it will be seen that the humblest lives may have done more real work for God in the world than those that the world would call great and influential. We are all soldiers in God's army, and He has set us all at our appointed posts. One day He will come and see who has filled them faithfully; and, be sure, none will hear the "Well done, good and faithful servant," more clearly spoken, than he who has borne with patience and faith and trust the cross of pain and weakness.

Have you ever heard the story of the destruction of Pompeii, the ancient Italian town, which was overwhelmed and buried by the ashes of the great volcano Vesuvius, till nothing could be seen of it, and those of the inhabitants who could not escape perished with it? Many hundred years after, the ancient city was excavated, dug out, by

degrees, from the grave of ashes where it had lain hidden all those centuries. All sorts of strange and interesting things were found, showing how the dwellers in Pompeii, who had been a gay and pleasure-loving people, had been destroyed in the midst of their games, and sports, and feasting, and theatre-going.

But the most interesting thing of all, and far the noblest, was the skeleton of a soldier, who had evidently been on guard near the gates of the city when the terrible eruption took place. He would not leave his post until his commanding-officer ordered him, or until the time came to change guard. So he died at his post—a brave example to after ages of devotion to duty, of faithfulness in the post where he had been placed.

And so may you prove yourself the faithful soldier, no less now than when you had to mount guard, or to march and fight in your country's service. For GOD has set you where you are; He will give you strength to be brave and true; and, when the end of suffering comes, you will hear His loving voice—

"Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy LORD."

XXI

The Wider Outlook

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."—*Isa.* lv. 8, 9.

We must always be reminding ourselves of the truth of those words, if we are to have any true peace or happiness in this life. What a puzzling thing life is at the best! Even those who are well in health, and have apparently easy happy lives, would tell you if you asked them, that they had quite enough to worry and make them anxious at times; that they came across plenty of difficulties, and ups and downs, in the course of their daily life; and that they often felt utterly perplexed as to the meaning of it all. And for you, who have lost your health, who have so much to bear day by day, the meaning and reason of it is perhaps yet more difficult to understand. Why should it be? you ask. And the answer is hard to find. Yes, indeed, wise men have tried to answer it, and cannot! The world is full of these mysteries, these difficulties that cannot be solved, these

questions that cannot be answered. Why should bad people so often prosper and get on, whilst better men are in poverty and misery? Why is that valuable life cut off in its prime, whilst some old person, who has lost sight and hearing and memory, lingers on, seeming to be a burden to himself and to others? And why is there so much pain and suffering? If GOD is really kind and loving, why should your life be as it is, why should you have so much to suffer without apparently any object in it?

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts," saith the LORD of Hosts, "neither are My ways your ways." Ah, there is the secret of it all, the answer to the riddle, the key that unlocks the mystery. GOD sees it all as we cannot see it. It is like a man standing on the top of a mountain and viewing the whole landscape of sea and land, and another man looking out of a small window and seeing only a little bit of it. The last man might see a little bit of fertile cultivated country and might pass his opinion on it as such. But the other man might see that that was only a small tract, a mere speck in the landscape; and that the rest of the country was wild and rocky, not fit for cultivation, except in just a few places. So one would go away with a complete idea of the country, and the other with a very incomplete one. The same with a book we might be reading. One man might read the half, and

throw it down, saying it was nonsense, and he could make nothing of it. Then the other man might say, "That is because you have only read half of it; go on and finish it, and you will find it all grows quite clear"; yet the last half would be nothing without the first to lead up to it.

And so it is with GOD in His dealings with the world, and with our separate lives. You and I have such a narrow outlook compared to His. We are only, as it were, at the little street window, whilst He is on the mountain top, viewing the whole thing in its completeness. We only see a little bit of the world, and a little bit of our own lives at a time; but He sees the whole. He sees the past and the present and the future, all woven into one great whole; and He judges thus far better of the value of this and that event in our lives than we can. He sees it at its true value, and what part it plays in the whole great scheme of the life of the world which He has planned out, and of which our lives are only a part. That life, cut off in its prime, may have, in GOD'S sight, finished its appointed work here; and is perhaps wanted in some higher world, for special work GOD has planned for it elsewhere, no less necessary and important because it is out of human sight. And that apparently useless life may have uses we know not of; and may be kept here for the sake of some other person, whose qualities of patience and

kindness and forbearance it may be helping to bring out and strengthen. The same with the poverty and suffering in the world. It all has its part in the great scheme; and although some of it may seem to us terrible and unnecessary, we know it often does give opportunities of unselfishness and heroism on the one hand, and of generosity and kindness on the other.

So too, with your own suffering, that hardest riddle of all, because it concerns yourself, and comes nearest home of all to you. The pain, that seems almost cruel to you sometimes, is perhaps absolutely necessary to prepare you for the very best God has in store. The weakness and weariness are really chains of love drawing you to His side; making you lean on Him more trustfully, and look up to Him more earnestly; the long days and sleepless nights are a hush in your life, to give you time to learn more about Him than you would ever have known otherwise. We should not have chosen this way ourselves; but then God's ways and God's thoughts are higher than ours, and the path of our own choosing would not help us nearly so much in the end. We only feel the pain, but God sees what the effect of it will be; we only feel the weakness, but God sees the strength that grows out of it. We only see the end of the short life, but God sees the other life, of which that end is the beginning. I have heard of a certain

kind of tapestry or needlework, which had to be worked on the wrong side. The worker had to go patiently on, putting the needle in and out under certain rules, and yet see no results as she went along. Not until the work was complete and could be turned round in its frame, were all the beautiful pattern and colours shown to the worker; and then she was rewarded for her patience, and could see what had been the object and the meaning of all that patient stitching. So it is with our lives. One day we shall see the pattern complete; and then we shall realize how every day had its part in the great whole; the joys and sorrows alike, the comfort and the pain, all helped to make it complete. One would not be perfect without the other; God knew best all along; and His plan for our lives was one of unfailing love and goodness. There are some words from the verses of a great poet which run thus:

"And I smiled to think God's greatness runs around our incompleteness,
Round our restlessness His rest."

Have you ever sat on the sea shore and watched the tide come in; wave after wave, gathering, curling, breaking on the rocks and sand, each in turn and in his own order? But then, when the tide is high, and they reach the appointed mark, they turn just as surely; never going a yard beyond the mark, and drawing back by degrees and degrees

again to the point they came from. If God can curb the strong waves like this, setting bounds to the great ocean, can we not trust Him to manage our lives for us better, far better, than we could manage them for ourselves? We see such a little way; only as it were, the little sandy bay where the waves are breaking in obedience to His will; but outside in the open sea, over the great universe, the whole is in His control. He holds it, so the Bible says, in the hollow of His hand. Some day we shall see things more as He does; but until then, we must be content to let Him see for us, and plan out our lives for us accordingly.

XXII

Strength in Weakness

"My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."—*2 Cor.* xii. 9.

Strength made perfect in weakness! The words sound strange, almost a contradiction, an impossibility. But it was God Who spoke the words, and with Him all things are possible. Let us see how this can be.

I have often told you about S. Paul, that grand servant of Jesus Christ, who spoke for Him so fearlessly, who suffered so long and so much for His Name, and at last laid down his life for Him. And the wonderful letters he wrote to his friends, to confirm and encourage them in the faith of Christ, are one of the most important parts of the Bible; and have been the help and comfort of Christ's Church ever since, a very treasure-house of truth, and a light and guide for us all.

It is in one of these letters that the words I have just read occur. S. Paul was telling the story of his wonderful conversion. He had not always been a servant of Jesus Christ. He was brought up to a different

belief; and there was a time when he actually persecuted the followers of CHRIST, and tried to prevent them preaching His Word. He was one of those earnest, energetic men who never do things by halves, and, in the mistaken belief that JESUS was not the SON of GOD, and that such an idea ought to be put down, he devoted all his time and strength to doing so.

But GOD had meant him for different work to this. One day, when he was journeying from one town to another, actually in pursuit of Christians whom he hoped to seize and put to death, S. Paul had a wonderful vision, which changed his whole after life, and turned him from being an enemy of JESUS CHRIST into one of the most devoted servants of His that ever lived.

After the vision, S. Paul was blind for a time. GOD had so much to say to him, that perhaps He thought it best to shut his eyes awhile to earthly things. Then his sight was given back to him; but, ever afterwards, during all the years he devoted to GOD'S service, we read that he was affected with some bodily infirmity. We are not told what it was, but we suppose it lasted till his dying day. S. Paul himself called it a "thorn in the flesh"; something, perhaps, painful, troublesome, annoying, that sapped his strength, and tried his patience, just as your illness now is doing to you.

Three times, says S. Paul, he besought of

God to take away this thorn in the flesh, and make him whole and sound; so that, as it seemed to him, perhaps, he could work for God and man better, and bring more believers into the Church.

But God did not grant the prayer. For some good reason it was best that His servant should not be freed from this cross that had been given him to bear. But, though He did not grant the thing asked for, He answered the prayer; and the words in which He answered it have helped many and many a servant of God since. "My grace," that is, My help, "is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

You see, He wanted S. Paul to understand, and I think He wants us all to understand, that it is not in our own strength we can do anything; that, if we are to be His true soldiers and servants, and do good work in the world, it is only through Him we can do it. We are God's instruments only. He does the work, and makes use of men to do it; so His strength and wisdom are behind it all the time.

And thus it has come about, that, again and again, God has chosen, not the strong and mighty, but the weak and small people and things of the world, to bring about the great works He wished to accomplish. We often find instances of this in Bible history; and when our Lord came to earth, it was one of the most striking parts of His teaching.

"I thank Thee, O FATHER," He said, "that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes," meaning by the words, not children, but those whom the world considered weak and simple.

And when He blessed the little children, He said, "Of such are the kingdom of heaven." GOD'S kingdom is largely made up of those whom the world call weak and insignificant.

So S. Paul listened, and learned his lesson; learned it so well that he was able to say to his friends, "When I am weak, then am I strong." Strong, not in his own strength, either of mind or body; but in that of the LORD and Master Who, he knew, would never forsake him, and Who was nearer to him in his bodily weakness than He had been in the days of his health and strength.

And GOD wants you, I think, to learn that same lesson, the lesson of strength in weakness, *GOD'S* strength made perfect in *your* weakness, made perfect as perhaps it would never have been but for this suffering He has sent you.

Weakness is a hard thing to bear. S. Paul found it so. People used to look down on him because of it, and make it harder for him to help those whom he wanted to help.

You find it hard too. You would like to be busy and active, to shape your own life, and fight your own battles; and do for your-

self what you now have to depend on others to do for you.

But when you feel your weakness most, try to think that now is the very time when God can fulfil this wonderful promise of His. For in that very weakness of yours He can show His strength. He can give you that spiritual strength, that is worth a hundred times more than the bodily strength of the strongest man who ever lived. He can give you that wonderful power to bear that is even nobler than the power to do. His grace is sufficient for you. He can make good all that seems to be lacking, and increase it a hundredfold. He can give you a double share of His strength, to make up for the bodily strength He has seen fit to take away from you.

And so by your patience, and your kindness to those around you, by your brave bearing of pain and discomfort, by your steadfast faith in Him, sure that, if He sends this trouble, it must be all for the best; you can do the work He has set you to do for Him; you can help others by your example, and you can glorify Him Whose strength is thus made perfect in your weakness.

XXIII

Suffering with Him

"If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."—*Rom.* viii. 17.

"That I may know Him . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings."—*Phil.* iii. 10.

One of the most beautiful stories in the Old Testament is that of the three brave young Israelities, who, captives in a strange and heathen land, refused to be untrue to their God. In spite of the unalterable decree of the great heathen king, that those who refused to kneel to the golden image he had set up, were to be punished by being cast into a fiery furnace, they continued to say their prayers as before—to God alone. In all other ways they were quiet and orderly subjects, and obeyed the laws of the land; but on that point, their duty to God, they stood firm, and faced the death which they knew must await them without flinching. They knew that God had promised never to forsake His own. They knew that, however hot the furnace might be, however sharp the trial, whatever it would feel like to be scorched and burnt, and to die in agony, one thing was certain—that God would be

with them, and that with Him for a Companion, to stand by them and cheer them, nothing could really matter, or indeed hurt them permanently. And so they went calmly into the burning fiery furnace, that had been heated seven times hotter than usual by the king's orders, on purpose to show his anger and revenge on those who thus coolly dared to brave his authority, and disobey his decrees. And then what happened? That story has been told again and again. It is read in church every year; yet it never grows old, or loses one bit of its noble interest and meaning.

As the king and his courtiers watched the furnace in their cruel revengeful delight, their faces changed—for what did they see? Instead of three men writhing in agony, shrivelled and twisted out of recognition by the terrible heat, there were instead four men walking calmly about, quiet and unhurt in the midst of the flames. And the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. Christ had not deserted His faithful servants. God had not withheld His never-failing help in their hour of need. And with that Divine Companion they walked unhurt in the terrible furnace, brave forerunners of hundreds of other faithful sufferers who have felt God nearer to them in the hour of trial than in the sunny, thoughtless days of prosperity.

And so it is of suffering with Christ that I want to speak to you to-day. For just as

suffering apart from CHRIST is too terrible a thought to dwell on—all hopelessness and darkness, the kind of suffering, in fact, that we might picture a lost soul, condemned to hell, to be enduring—so suffering with CHRIST is a high and noble calling, a position to be envied by those who have never tasted the experience of the companionship of JESUS CHRIST. Just think for a moment how this wonderful story of the four men in the furnace applies to you. You too are called by GOD to pass through the furnace—the furnace of suffering. Ah! how it hurts only you and GOD Himself knows. Pain, restlessness, sleeplessness, the weariness of utter weakness and helplessness, they are indeed like a fire, burning away your very life. And the fire touches your soul as well. It tries to destroy hope, and make you feel wretched and depressed and unhappy. It attacks faith and tempts you to say, How is it possible that GOD is merciful and pitiful if He lets me suffer like this? It is no good denying that suffering *is* a furnace, and a very scorching one. But now listen. You are not alone—there is One with you in the furnace, and His form is like unto the SON of GOD. For that Companion *is* the SON of GOD.

That same JESUS Who left His glory in heaven to come and die for you, Who hung on the Cross and suffered agonies unknown, passed through the very hottest of the furnace Himself, and He is with you now.

You know what it is when you are in great pain to feel a friend near you, a familiar face full of love and sympathy, a strong, tender hand holding yours fast—even in the worst moments it helps you; it makes the suffering just a little lighter and easier to bear.

Such a friend is never wanting whilst JESUS CHRIST is with you. He gave you your human friends to show you what His love is; for all true unselfish love is from GOD—a sign and pledge of His care for us. Perhaps you are sometimes tempted to think that, in this great world, there is so much suffering, such thousands needing His help, that He cannot have much attention to spare for you in particular. But that is just the wonderful part of GOD's love. He cares just as much about you and your individual, separate suffering, as if you were the only person in the world, and He had only you to think about and attend to. The fact that He cares just as much for other sufferers does not make an atom of difference to His love for you. He is your Friend, your Saviour, your Companion in the furnace; and He will never leave you nor forsake you, though a million others claim His attention at the same time.

There is a beautiful song of praise in our Prayer Book, used at certain seasons in church; and its name is "The Song of the Three Children." It is supposed to have been sung by these very three servants, or children of GOD, in thanksgiving for their

wonderful deliverance from the fire. They wanted every one to understand and feel and know the great love and power that had stood by them in their hour of need; and they called upon the works of GOD, from the sun and moon, the mountains and hills, the seas, rivers, beasts, and cattle, and then upon men themselves, who can understand better than these, to praise and bless a GOD Who could such wonderful things for His people.

And so you too, feeling the companionship of your LORD and Master, will grow every day nearer to Him; and a great peace and thankfulness will come and settle down in your heart, which no pain or suffering can take away from you.

XXIV

The Voice Across the Water

"It is I; be not afraid."—*S. Matt.* xiv. 27.

When were these words spoken? Our Lord had been parted a little while from His friends. They had gone out again to their old occupation of fishing, and had been caught in one of those sudden storms that sweep down sometimes upon inland lakes amongst the hills. They were in difficulties with their boat; the waves were too high and the wind too strong for them. Their hearts began to fail. They had the feeling of being overwhelmed, "beaten" as we call it, that we all have some time in our lives. Ah! those times, when the pain or the sorrow, or the difficulty, seems too much for us. Everything looks dark behind and before, and we stretch out our hands in vain for something to hold on to.

And then see what happened to those men in their boat on the stormy sea. A form came to them walking on the water, and as they looked and hardly recognized Who it was, and in their bewilderment and anxiety cried out for fear, something else came to

them, something they could not fail to recognize. A voice, a voice they knew and loved. The same voice that had told them about GOD and His love, that had spoken so plain and straight about right and wrong, that had comforted the sorrowful, and spoken cheering words to the sick, and taught the multitude who gathered together to hear it again and again.

And what did the voice say? "It is I; be not afraid." Be not afraid of waves and wind. Be not afraid of your own sinking spirits and failing courage. Be not afraid because I come in a strange and unfamiliar way. It is I, and if it is I, there is nothing to fear.

We all know it, the feeling those tempest-tossed men must have had when they heard those words; the feeling that some one we know and trust is near, so that it is all right, and nothing really matters.

And just as our LORD came to His friends that stormy night across the water, so He comes to us in the storms of our lives, when the deep waters overwhelm us, and we feel as if we were sinking to rise no more. And He says the very same words—"It is I; be not afraid."

The trouble seems to get heavier, the future blacker. But, still, "It is I." The days and nights of weariness get longer and harder to bear. But still "It is I." The pain gets more racking and wearing, almost

unbearable at times. But, "It is I; be not afraid." "Not a trouble, not a pang, not a dark moment, but I am there; I am behind the trouble." Across the dark waters He comes to us. "It is I; be not afraid."

Just notice that at first the very coming of our LORD to the disciples upon the waters did not comfort, but frightened them. They were startled at the strange apparition, just when they least expected it. They had left Him on the shore, and here He was miles from it. Could it be really He? And walking on the sea? Surely it was some spirit, not their own familiar Master, Who was wont to go about in the ordinary way.

And it is the same with us. When trouble, sickness, pain, comes, we do not realize it is the Hand of GOD. We do not realize that, in that very trouble, JESUS CHRIST comes to us. It is He; we need not be afraid. What a difference it makes at once! Supposing you are in great pain. The doctor or the nurse touches the spot with a view to finding out what is the cause of it, and to healing and helping the sufferer. Is there not all the difference between that sort of touch, and the cruel wanton hand of the man who does not want to help, who wishes to give pain, perhaps? The same sort of difference lies between suffering with JESUS, and suffering apart from Him. And it all depends on whether we hear His voice—"It is I; be not afraid," whether we realize His nearness to us.

When you look back on your life—and illness often makes us look back—do you remember certain times of crisis, of danger, or trouble, or whatever it might be, when He spoke to you and you did not hear Him? How careless and thoughtless of Him you have often been, and yet He has never forgotten you for one moment; never has His loving care and watchfulness failed.

Let us remember, if He ever gives us the chance again—and I think He is giving you a chance at this very time—to listen better, to give ourselves more wholly to His service, and obey every tone of His loving voice.

Then, when the storm rises, and the clouds gather; when trouble, sickness, pain, even death draw near; we shall hear the same familiar voice, and the words will still be the same—"It is I; be not afraid."

XXV

HOME

"A city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is GOD."—*Heb.* xi. 10.

"Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."—*Heb.* xiii. 14.

PEOPLE have often wondered, and quite naturally, why it was that amongst all the true, and comforting, and helpful words spoken by our LORD, when He was on earth, He said so little about the next life, after death; about the home we all hope to go to one day. No doubt He had good reasons for this, and perhaps one of them was that our ideas of happiness, even in this life, change as life advances; that different people, too, have quite different ideas as to what would make them most happy, so that it would be impossible to describe one heaven that would be attractive to all.

So He bade them look more and more to Himself and to the FATHER through Him, and so grow to trust Him, and leave it in His hands as to what things He would prepare for those that love Him. And the more we get to love Him, the more we are willing to trust this, like all other questions, in His

hands, feeling sure that He will decide it for the best, and that His love will be able to provide something far better than we could imagine for ourselves.

"To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," He said to the penitent thief on the cross. He did not describe what Paradise was to be like; but the two words, "with Me," told all that was necessary. The presence of CHRIST was certain, and that was enough. We too shall be with Him, and where He is will be perfect peace and rest and joy, and an ever-growing knowledge of Him and power to serve Him better. As we grow here in His love, the more we shall look forward to this. He has gone to prepare a place for us; a home safe from the storms of the world; our true and our only lasting home, because it is no passing dwelling-place, but for ever and ever.

"Home." There is a music about that word that no other can ever pretend to. You know what home is to the soldier, when he is hundreds and thousands of miles away from it. It is like an anchor to him wherever he may be. Is not the home mail the event of the week? Is not the thought of home his strongest influence for good. I remember a soldier telling me once, that a letter from home containing some suspicions about him and suggesting he might be a man whose name had appeared in the papers as being untrue to his colours, almost drove him to

go wrong wilfully. If *they* didn't believe in him at home, nothing seemed to matter. And you know how a soldier counts the months and days till he goes home, and the excitement of a homeward-bound regiment, or time-expired draft. "We're going home, we're going home, the ship is on the shore," writes Rudyard Kipling; and you can almost feel the stir of the foreign seaport, and see the merry faces of the men, as they exchange chaff, and always the uppermost topic is "Home."

They forget the troubles and difficulties that may await them, in the thought of the white cliffs of England, and the welcoming faces and voices of home.

The sound of "Home, sweet Home" is almost painful in a foreign country, and the pipers of the Highland regiments were forbidden to play "Lochaber no More" at the time of the Peninsular War, because it made the men miserable with home-sickness.

So much for an earthly home; and now I want you to get the same sort of idea about the other home to which you are travelling, and about which GOD has bidden you think so much lately.

We have talked about the affection men have for their earthly homes; but we all know that there are certain cases when home means little or nothing to a man. Possibly he has never known a home worth the name. He was left an orphan as a little child, and was

brought up in a school or Union, where he was only one in a crowd, and never knew a father's care or a mother's watchful, tender love. Or, worse still, perhaps, one or both of his parents were people of bad life, who made home wretched for their children.

Or again, the fault may be in himself. He may have been a bad, undutiful, rebellious child, who feels he has forfeited his place at home, and having never written home or kept touch with those still there, he hardly knows if it still exists. To such the thought of going home means nothing.

I have said all this, and tried to illustrate my meaning by a sort of parable of an earthly home. For what reason?

Because I want you to see that it matters less what our future home will be like, than whether or not we shall be happy there. And that depends a great deal on ourselves.

I don't mean to say, that if our lives have not been perfectly good lives, we shall not be fit to live with GOD. All our lives, as we look back on them, are full of faults and sins, and shortcomings. We should never be fit to stand before GOD at all, if we trusted to anything we have done, or not done, ourselves. It is only in JESUS CHRIST and His righteousness, that we can dare ever to think of that country where we shall see GOD face to face.

No! what I mean is *this*; that unless we have thought about that home, and the GOD Who has prepared it for us, it will have no

attraction for us. Unless our hearts have turned to Him, the place where He is cannot mean much to us. We are not like the Union children who have never known a home. Still less are we like the children of bad parents, to whom home never meant anything but misery.

Our FATHER'S love, tenderer than the tenderest mother's, not only fills the home above, but reaches out to the least of His children, and touches even the most careless and sinful.

But have we thought of it? Has it been an anchor to us, like your home was, perhaps, when you were serving abroad?

If not, think of it now.

Think of its freedom from pain.

"And GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

That in itself is a good thought, is it not, to you who have so much to suffer here?

But better than that, think of the freedom from sin; no more temptation, no more inclination even to do or say or think what is wrong.

Think of the freedom from earthly care. There will be nothing to worry about then; all the anxieties will be over, because GOD will have set you free once and for all from the difficulties and troublesome circumstances of this work-a-day world.

Think of the meeting with those you loved and who have passed to that home before you—the father and mother who made your childhood's home what it was. Perhaps she died whilst you were abroad, and that shadow darkened the home-coming; you felt home was not home without her.

I remember once having to break the news to a soldier that he was dying. And I tried to cheer him by saying it would be a better home-coming than the one he had from India, because this time, the welcome from the mother he loved so much would not be missing.

That comrade you left behind in India, in some station where fever wrought such havoc in the regiment, or in the South African veldt amongst the many soldiers' graves—what a welcome he will give you! especially if you were kind to him, and above all, if your example helped him to where he is now.

As the hymn says: "What knitting severed friendships up, where partings are no more." Some one once said, and truly, of this world, that there are so many more partings than meetings. And that is one of the things that will be set right in the next.

And above all, GOD will be there, Who loved you from the beginning of the world, and Who longed to have you at last to live with Him and make you happy for ever.

JESUS CHRIST will be there, Who loved

sinners, and gave His life to save them; Who cared for the sick and suffering, and Who pities and cares for you now, day by day, more than the best earthly friend; and Who has never left you for one moment, even when the pain was worst, and you felt nearest to despair.

GOD the HOLY GHOST will be there, Who helped you to be brave and patient, and turned all the suffering somehow into good, though you cannot see how at present.

If you have not thought of that home when you were well and strong—and none of us have thought of it enough—think of it now. Don't worry about what it will be like. That is hidden in GOD's knowledge. But just rest in the thought that He knows, and that He also knows *you*, and what is best and happiest for you.

No doubt He has work for you to do (heaven will not be all singing hymns, I feel sure), the work that suits you best and will be most to His glory.

There He has health and strength, and far better, the robe of righteousness waiting for you; there you will be able to love Him and to serve Him perfectly, and that alone means perfect happiness. There you will be at home, because you will be with Him; and nothing can ever separate you from Him again.

XXVI

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

(GOOD FRIDAY)

THIS week we call Holy Week, and this Friday we call Good Friday. Let us try to think why. It is because, on the first Good Friday, our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the SON of GOD, died on the Cross for us. We can never understand why this had to be; but we know in no other way could we be saved; in no other way could our sins be washed away and the gates of heaven opened to us.

So let us try to fix our thoughts to-day on this wonderful event—JESUS CHRIST, Who had never sinned, and Who might have been still on His throne in heaven, willingly suffering because of His great love for us, for you and me; hanging on the Cross in pain and weariness, that we might be saved.

There is nothing we admire more than a man giving his life to save a comrade, rushing back into the line of fire to save a wounded friend. And it is right we should admire it, for every man who sacrifices himself for others, who puts others' safety and welfare

before his own, is following in the footsteps of the great Example—JESUS CHRIST. I think sometimes we are rather apt to think of JESUS as rather a soft, womanly character, but there never was a greater mistake—JESUS CHRIST was the most manly and the bravest man who ever lived. He feared nothing except doing wrong. Listen to what the Bible says of Him—"Therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." Could there be braver words, more soldierly words than these, for a man who had to suffer and die for what was right. Yes, He is the Captain of our salvation. On the Cross, in that bitter conflict with death and sin, He fought a harder fight than He ever calls His soldiers on earth to face; and He conquered them for us; He won the greatest victory warrior ever won.

For three long hours He hung upon that Cross, and we must remember that it was a death of shame. In those days, crucifixion —that is, being nailed hand and foot to a wooden cross, and hanging there till, from pain, loss of blood, and exposure, the victim died—was a criminal's death: what hanging is to-day. So you see He had shame—undeserved shame—to bear as well as suffering. His enemies had nothing to accuse Him of, but they brought false accusations against Him; and His cowardly and unjust judge, though he knew JESUS was innocent, condemned Him to die, because he wanted to

please the people, and so make things easier for himself.

And while He hung there, I think He thought of and prayed for all the sufferers who should follow after Him. Good Friday has a wonderful message for the sick and suffering—a message of hope, and comfort, and sympathy, and peace.

Seven times during those three hours our LORD spoke. And, just as we treasure up and remember the last words of those whom we love and have lost awhile, so the Church, the great family of CHRIST, treasures up and remembers these Seven Words from the Cross.

Here is the First Word: "FATHER, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

These words were spoken whilst He was actually being nailed to the Cross. It was the Jews who caused JESUS CHRIST to be crucified. They were His own people, yet they refused to believe in Him as their Saviour. But in those days the Jews had been conquered by the Romans; and their country was occupied by the Romans, just as we English occupy India or South Africa. They had to get leave from the Roman governor at Jerusalem before they could crucify JESUS; and it was the duty of the Roman soldiers under his orders to nail the prisoners to the cross. They did not understand that they were putting the SON of GOD to shame and torture—they were simply obeying their orders. And JESUS, in spite of the bitter pain,

prayed for them to His FATHER—"FATHER, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Do you think you could have done the same for those who were driving in the nails? When we are in pain, when we are tired and worried, we are all too apt to be cross and irritable, even with those who want to help us. But here we have the example of perfect patience in suffering. And the same of forgiveness. How often we say, "I can never forgive So-and-so"; or perhaps, "Well, I may forgive, but I can never forget." Let us try to copy our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and forgive from our hearts every injury. No one has sinned against us so badly as He was sinned against.

"They know not what they do"—so He pleads for us still. How often and often we have sinned against, neglected, forgotten Him! But we did not realize how wrong we were; we "knew not what we did." And so, instead of being angry with us, you see, He makes excuses to GOD, and asks Him to forgive us. What a wonderful love, what a never-failing patience with us—His sinful and forgetful children!

The Second Word: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

I told you before that crucifixion was, in the days when our LORD lived on earth, the death for criminals. And there were two others executed at the same time—thieves, probably highway-robbers, who would murder

as well as rob to get what they wanted. Now, they were at last captured, tried, and convicted; and they hung one on each side of our LORD on their two crosses. They had led bad lives, and it had brought them to this. JESUS was the one Man Who had never sinned. He was not suffering for His own sins, but for ours and theirs too.

The crowd, who stood round the Cross, mocked and sneered at our LORD. That was one of the hard things He had to bear. It is bad enough to suffer pain; but to be jeered at, to have to listen to unkind words and insults at the same time makes it harder still. One of the thieves, we know, perhaps both of them, joined in all this to begin with. Just like some people try to relieve their pain by cursing and swearing, it seemed as if these men wanted to pay it off on Him Who hung so patiently between them.

But after a while one of them repented. Perhaps the wonderful example of courage and patience beside him made him suddenly realize what a different man he might have been, how he had wasted his life; and now he was looking death in the face, and what would be the end? How could he bear even the thought? What should he do? He did the very best thing he could have done—the very best thing we all can do when we are in trouble and misery, whether through our own fault or not. He asked JESUS CHRIST to help him—"LORD, remember me when Thou comest into Thy

kingdom." It wanted faith in that man to believe that this poor despised Sufferer on the Cross next to his was the SON of GOD—able to help and save. But he believed; and our LORD rewarded his faith by one of the most wonderful promises that was ever spoken—"To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

It was all forgiven, the carelessness and forgetfulness of GOD, the bad, wasted, reckless life. The sinner was repentant, the wanderer had come home; and He, Who never casts any one out who comes to Him, had taken him back. *To-day*—that very evening, when the three lifeless bodies had been taken away to burial; when the crowd had dispersed and the darkness come on, he was to be with JESUS in Paradise; all his pain and weariness over, all the sin and temptation shut out—close to this new Friend of his, Whose great love and suffering had won him and saved him at last.

And so it is with us. No one truly repents in vain. No one prays to GOD in real earnest but the answer comes. And for you especially, who have so much to suffer here, there is always in front the thought of that rest in Paradise. When you lose consciousness of earth, there will be Paradise on the other side; and, above all, there will be JESUS. "To-day shalt thou be *with Me*." And to be with Him will be all we can desire, for He loved us well enough to die for us. We do not know what Paradise will be like; but, if it is to be with Him, our dearest longings

will be satisfied. Then do not let us put off our repentance. We have all sinned, like the penitent thief; we all have carelessness, neglect of GOD, failure, defeat, to bring to the Cross of JESUS. But if we are really sorry, if we really believe, He will be just as ready to receive us and to forgive us, as He was the dying thief on that first Good Friday.

The Third Word: "Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!"

Even in His worst pain, JESUS CHRIST always had time to think of other people. At the foot of the Cross there stood one little band of faithful followers—His disciples, the men who had followed and learned of Him, and who were going forth to do His work, and help others after He was gone. And there was also His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. What she must have been suffering we can imagine a little. You know what a mother's love is—how she would rather suffer herself than see her child suffer. Even a son who is no comfort to his mother, who rather causes her anxiety, she loves and cares for. What then must Mary have felt for her SON, JESUS CHRIST, the only perfect SON. He looked down on her, and He looked down on S. John, the one of all His friends who perhaps loved Him most; and in the few words I have just read He commended her to S. John's care. He was to be a son to her. And just as this care would be a comfort to the mother, so her love would be a comfort to S. John after the

loss of his Master, and he would feel he had something to do for Him still.

I think this story shows us how much GOD cares about our earthly love for each other; how it pleases Him to see good sons and good mothers, good brothers and sisters, and good friends; and how such love on earth will continue in heaven. Love is a wonderful influence in life. It makes the darkest places bright, and puts interest and courage and hope into lives that would be twice as hard without it.

It is far too strong a tie to be broken by death; and we may feel sure that it will go on in heaven—the love of mother and son, of brother and brother, sister and sister, friend and friend. Only there it will be stronger and purer, and there will be no more disappointments, and no more partings.

The Fourth Word: "My GOD, My GOD, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

This was a cry of loneliness. Have you ever felt alone? Have you ever felt that no one cared for you, that the world was empty, and dark, and desolate? Then in this, too, JESUS CHRIST can sympathize and understand. He knows what it is to feel lonely. As He hung on the Cross, a cloud seemed to come between Him and GOD the FATHER, and He felt as if He were utterly forsaken. It is bad enough to be weak and suffering; but worse than pain of body is trouble of mind—to feel that no one cares about the suffering, that we

are deserted and left to ourselves. But JESUS CHRIST felt it. He could not save us, He could not do His great work for us, without feeling this trouble too. And just because He felt it, we need never feel lonely again; or, at any rate, we need never feel really forsaken, for He is with us. Try to think of this when you get depressed and low-spirited. JESUS CHRIST felt like that too, and He knows what it is like. And do not forget that He is with you. He never leaves you, and never will leave you for one moment, unless you drive Him away yourself.

"Lo, I am with you alway"—all the days, the dark ones as well as the bright ones—"even unto the end of the world."

The Fifth Word: "I thirst."

This was the only time JESUS CHRIST spoke on the Cross about His own bodily sufferings, and I think we should be thankful He said these words, because He showed by them that He was a real Man as well as GOD; that, when He came down to earth and took our nature upon Him, He took all the bodily weaknesses and suffering that belongs to our human bodies too. You know what thirst is. You have very likely felt it in tropical climates. Perhaps you know, as the result of wounds and fever, what it is to be nearly mad with thirst. Even now it is very likely one thing you have to endure in your illness. And you can imagine how, with His open wounds, hanging there in the blazing Eastern sun,

thirst must have been one of the horrors of the Cross. It has been said that JESUS CHRIST wanted to "feel all, that He might pity all"; and so it was. There is not a single thing you have to bear, whether of pain or discomfort or weakness, but He knows about it. He feels for you in it.

And I think it will help you sometimes to remember that, when He calls His soldiers to suffer, He calls them to share His Cross. It is as though He said, "Can you bear something for Me?—I bore so much for you. To suffer is to be nearer to Me, to learn something of what I went through for you when I was here on earth. I did not look down on the suffering world from a distance, whilst I was safe and happy in heaven. I came down to earth, into the thick of the fight. I know what it is like, I wanted to bear it with you. Come, then, and bear it with Me. Be My true soldier. I am here to help and cheer and comfort, and at the end I promise you rest and reward." In the words of the Bible, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Oh, surely we can follow such a Leader wherever He bids us go; surely we too can carry the Cross He bore so bravely for us. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"—that is His promise to His true soldiers: life eternal, life free from pain and trouble, life with Him for evermore.

The Sixth Word: "It is finished."

Yes, it was finished—the great work of man's redemption. You know what the word *redeem* means—to buy back. The world was fallen and lost. Sin had come into it; and the only Son of God had left His throne in heaven, and come down to buy it back. What a heavy price it was!—the life of the pure, sinless Son of God. What He suffered we shall never know, for He bore the sins of the whole world, and that meant suffering of mind and body such as no man ever bore before or since.

And now it was finished. He felt death was near, and He knew at the same time that the world was redeemed; that you and I and all men, if only we would repent and believe, were saved for ever and ever.

So He spoke those three little words, "It is finished." Truly wonderful words, with so much meaning in them for us all. If He had not come down, and lived and died to save us, if He had not finished that great work, we should have been left to die in our sins; and we should have had nothing to look forward to after death—no certain hope, as we have now, for the life to come. But it is finished! that saving work of His, so we know that all is well. And so, although our own life here is so short, although that too may soon be finished, that is not the end—no indeed, only the beginning. For death is only the gate of life eternal, the threshold of the new and

glorious life that will never be finished, in which we shall learn to know and serve GOD better and better; and where, with those dear to us, we shall rejoice in His presence for ever.

The Seventh Word: "FATHER, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit."

The end was very near now. The faithful friends watching at the foot of the Cross must have felt thankful that it was so. It is sad to watch those whom we love suffering; and, though the parting with them is terribly hard, we sometimes feel that it is selfish to wish them to suffer longer.

But it must have been a comfort to them to hear this last word from the Cross. No cry of bitterness this time, no moan of pain. Just the quiet, trustful words, "FATHER, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit."

"Father"—the old familiar name, the first nearly that we learned to say. It reminds us of home, of childhood, of innocent, happy days long ago. And it reminds us, too, that we have another FATHER and another home, in which the old earthly home ties will all be renewed once more, the vacant places filled. It reminds us that we are GOD'S children, that He has loved us with an everlasting love, that He took us into His family when we were baptized, and has watched over and cared for us ever since; yes, and that, when we die, it will be going home to Him. "Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." It

is a solemn thought—that moment when the spirit leaves the body, when the soul goes back to GOD Who gave it.

But remember, the life of the soul never ceases, even for a minute, at the death of the body. You and I ourselves will be just as much alive five minutes after death as we are now. Death cannot touch the spirit. And if, after the example of our LORD and Master, Who passed through death before us, we commend our spirits unto our heavenly FATHER'S keeping, we shall have nothing to fear. Let us pray that when that time comes to each of us, we may think of and be comforted by the Cross of CHRIST.

"To Thy dear Cross turn Thou mine eyes in dying,
Lay but my fainting head upon Thy breast;
Those outstretched arms receive my latest sighing,
And then, oh, then, Thine everlasting rest."

And now for one moment let us look beyond the Cross to the Resurrection, beyond Good Friday to Easter Day. You know the story—how, on the third day, Sunday morning, a wonderful thing happened. After lying since Friday evening in the grave, JESUS CHRIST rose from the dead. Death could not destroy Him. The Cross was in reality the beginning of a great victory, for on it He conquered sin and death, and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. And when He rose again, never to die any more, the triumph of the Cross was complete.

We love to commemorate the great victories of our army, to keep such anniversaries as the Relief of Ladysmith, or Waterloo, or Albuera; and it is quite right and natural we should do so.

But Easter Day celebrates the greatest victory that was ever won, for all people and all nations have a share in it. And for the sick and suffering it has its special message of hope—nay, more than hope, of certainty.

For "Death is swallowed up in victory"; and, let us say it from our hearts, realizing it all the more after all our thoughts about Good Friday and the Cross—

"Thanks be to GOD, Which giveth us the victory through our LORD JESUS CHRIST."

PRINTED BY A. R. MOWBRAY AND CO. LTD.
LONDON AND OXFORD

DATE DUE

BV 16472
4910
D286 Debenham
1910 Suffering with Him

BV 16472
4910
D286 Debenham
1910 Suffering with Him

DEMCO